JIDAIGEKI COMIC SERIES
時代劇画
JIDA GEKI COMIC SERIES

ワイド版

剣客商売 1

KENKAKUSYOUBAI

時代劇シリーズ
HISTORY OF JAPAN
COMIC
SPECIAL SELECTION

さいとう・たかを
原作／池波正太郎
脚色／北 鏡太

SPコミックス

剣客商売

1

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脚色／北鏡太

さいとう・たかを
さいとう・プロ作品

Professional Swordsmen of The EDO Era Vol.1

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Dramatic Script : Kyota Kita / Production : Saito Production, Tokyo

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THIS BOOK IS AN ILLUSTRATED COMPILATION OF STORIES WRITTEN BY THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR. NAMES OF THE PEOPLE AND PLACES APPEARING HEREIN ARE IRRELEVANT TO THOSE SO IDENTIFIED IN HISTORICAL RECORDS.

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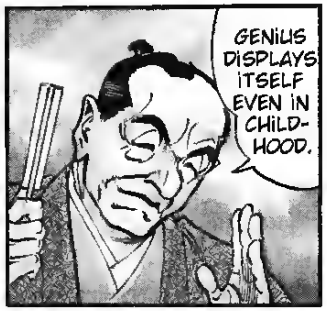
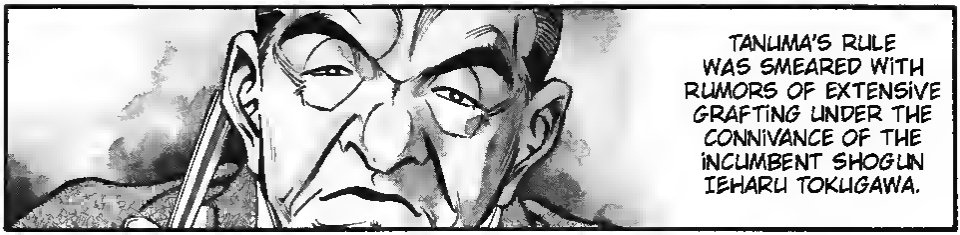
HOLD THERE!

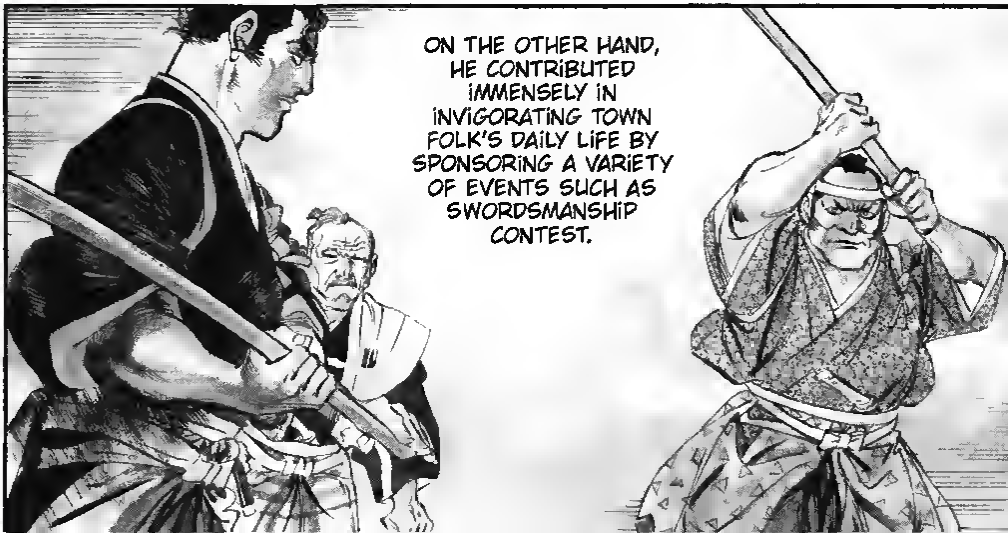


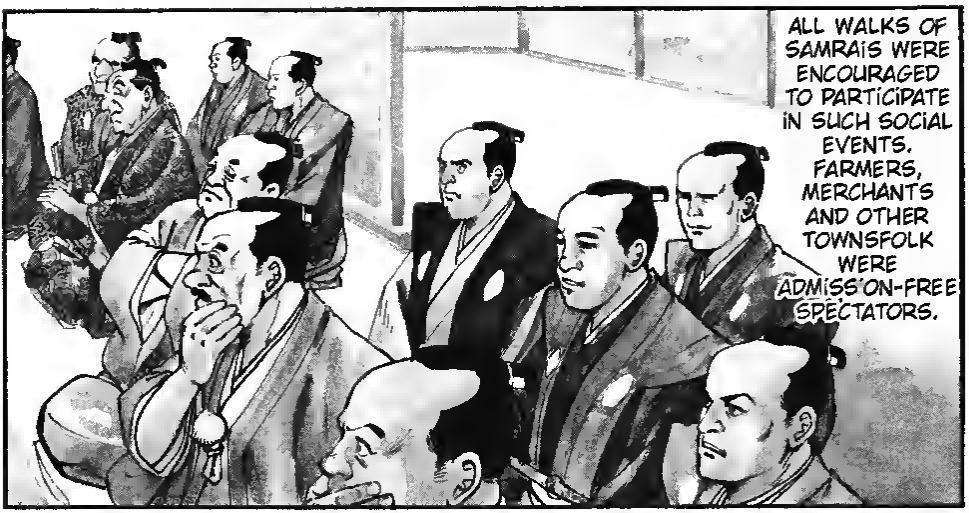
第一話 女武芸者

Story 1 : Transvestite Fighter of Fair Sex

DOWN TOWN MANSION BELONGING TO OKITSUGU TANUMA, PRIME MINISTER OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE GOVERNMENT.

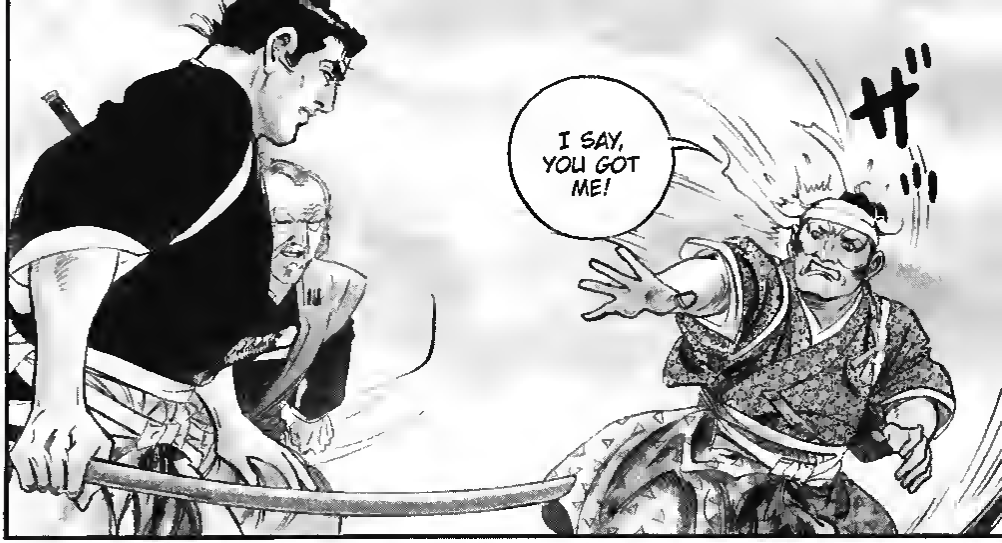

TANUMA'S RULE WAS SMEARED WITH RUMORS OF EXTENSIVE GRAFTING UNDER THE CONNIVANCE OF THE INCUMBENT SHOGUN IEHARU TOKUGAWA.


ON THE OTHER HAND, HE CONTRIBUTED IMMENSELY IN INVIGORATING TOWN FOLK'S DAILY LIFE BY SPONSORING A VARIETY OF EVENTS SUCH AS SWORDSMANSHIP CONTEST.


ALL WALKS OF SAMRAIS WERE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH SOCIAL EVENTS. FARMERS, MERCHANTS AND OTHER TOWNSFOLK WERE ADMISS'ON-FREE SPECTATORS.

YOU SAID IT, SIR.
THAT GUY IS GOOD, MY STEWARD OHYAMA!
IZUMI NAGAI, A HATA-MOTO

カウ
ゲ


I SAY, YOU GOT ME!

SIR!
HE IS INVINCIBLE!
WHAT ABOUT HIRING THAT SWORDSMAN FOR THAT SPECIAL MISSION?

ANOTHER ONE IS DOWN.
THAT'S THE SIXTH ONE HE HAS DISPATCHED.

HE IS AN INCONSPICUOUS WOLF. THA IS EASILY DISPOSABLE. WHEN NEED ARISES.

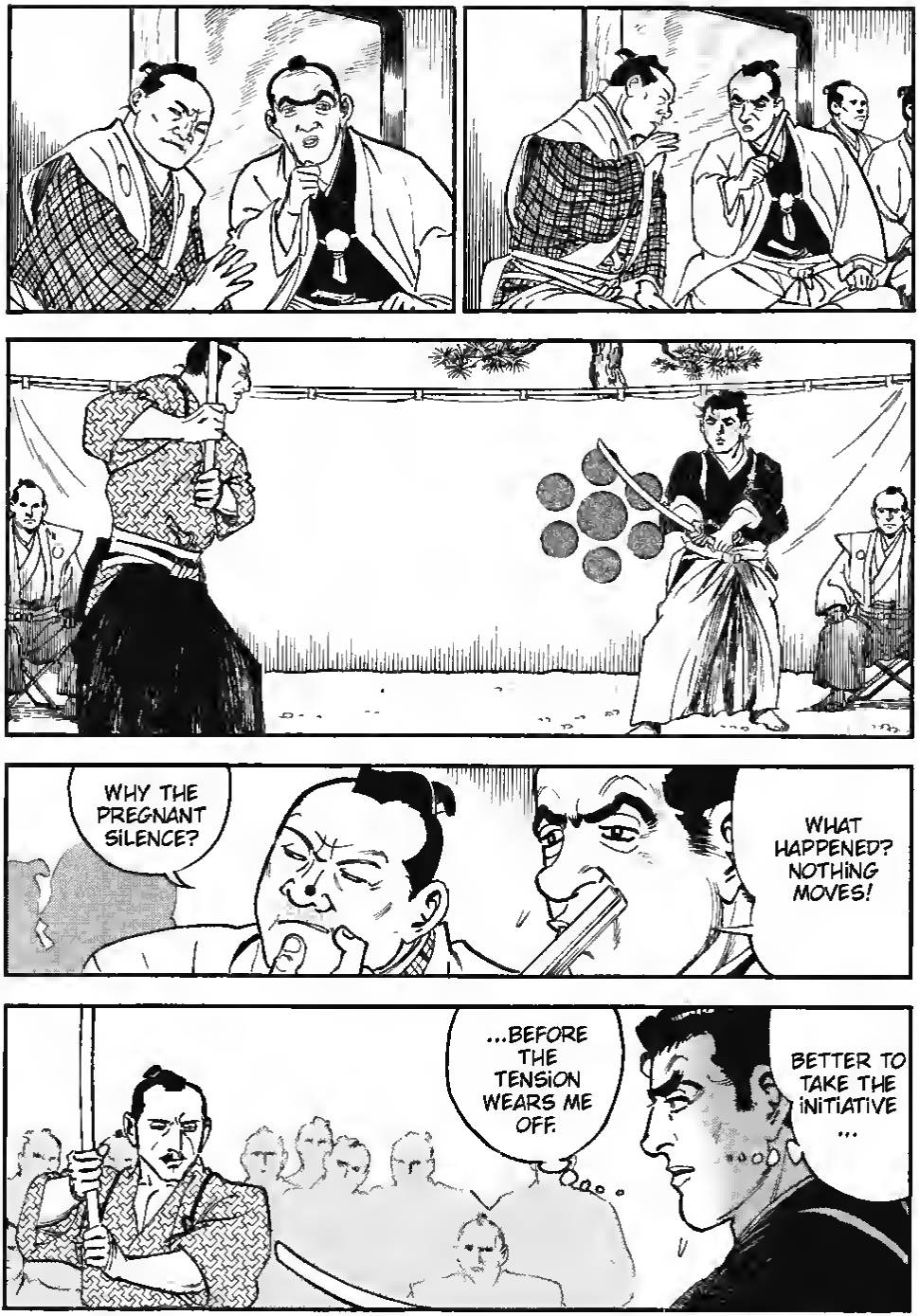
THE WOLF IS CUT OUT FOR THE SCHEME WE HAVE IN MIND.
HUM!

I SUR-
RENDER!

THAT'S THE
SEVENTH.

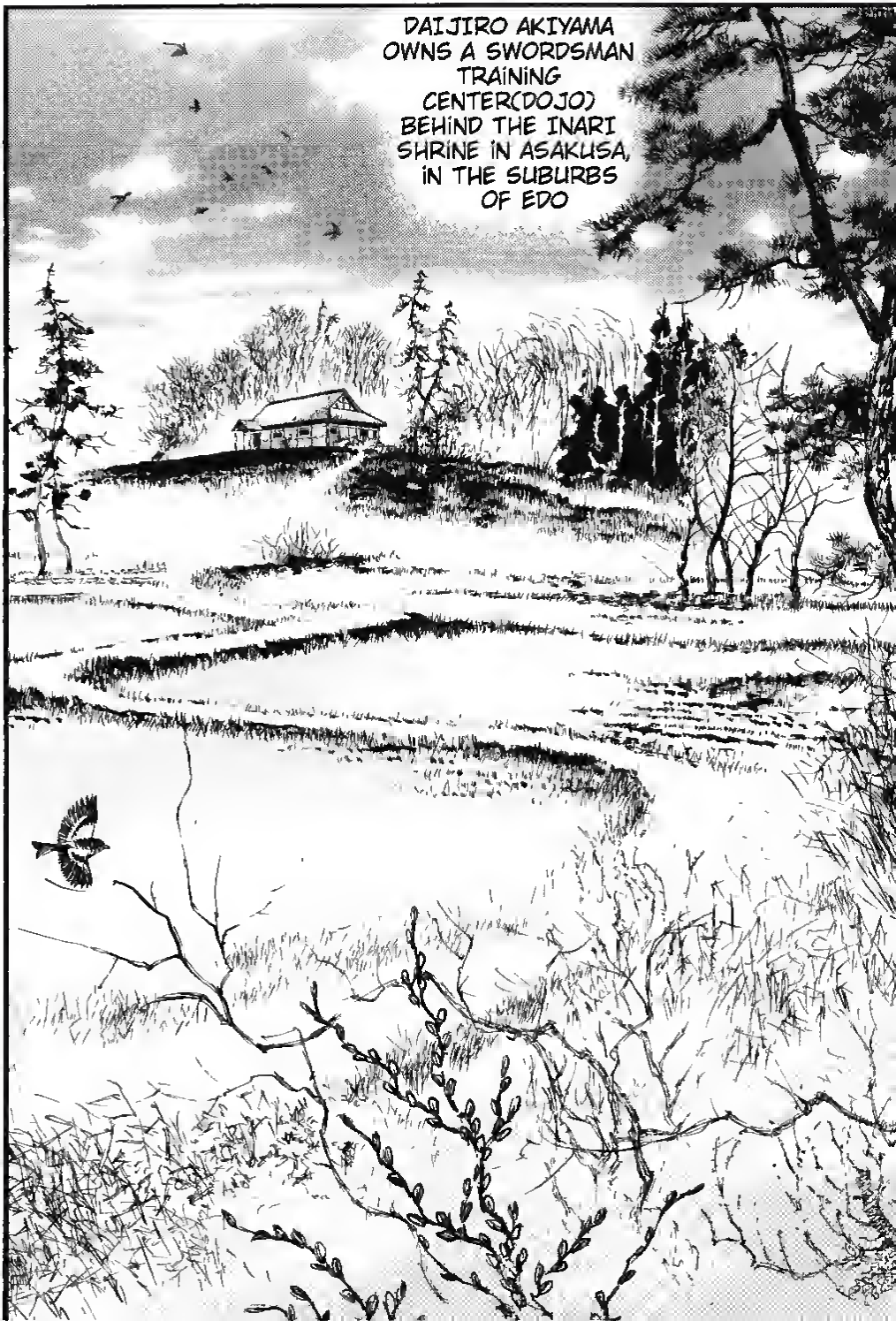
MY NAME IS
KURANDO MORI.
I'M FROM
THE SANADA
FIEFDOM IN
NAGANO.

THIS ONE IS TOUGH.
OOPH!

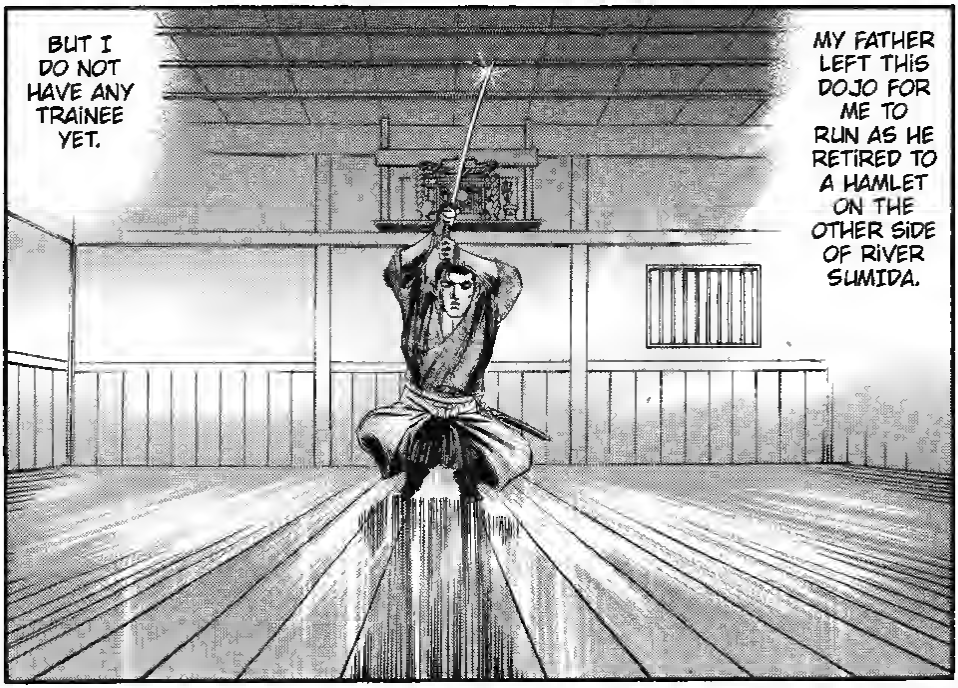

WHY THE PREGNANT SILENCE?
WHAT HAPPENED? NOTHING MOVES!
...BEFORE THE TENSION WEARS ME OFF.
BETTER TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE ...

TAAH!
NUU...!
TWO SIMULTA-NEOUS HITS!

NO, SIR! I'VE BEEN OVER-WHELMED.
I DECLARE A DRAW.
パ
チ
YOU ARE TO BE PRAISED KURANDO MORI.
I HOPE, THAT MY FATHER WOULD APPROVE OF MY PERFORMANCE AT THE CONTEST.
AT LEAST, MY SWORDSMANSHIP WON APPROVAL OF THE METROPOLITAN GALLERY. IT WAS WORTH TRAVELING TO EDO FROM A REMOTE COUNTRYSIDE.


DAIJIRO AKIYAMA
OWNS A SWORDSMAN
TRAINING
CENTER(DOJO)
BEHIND THE INARI
SHRINE IN ASAKUSA,
IN THE SUBURBS
OF EDO

I NOW RETIRE, YOU TAKE OVER MY CAREER AS SWORDSMAN.
YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN, FROM THIS POINT IN TIME ON, MY SON.


BUT I DO NOT HAVE ANY TRAINEE YET.
MY FATHER LEFT THIS DOJO FOR ME TO RUN AS HE RETIRED TO A HAMLET ON THE OTHER SIDE OF RIVER SUMIDA.

無外流秋山道場
ドン・ドンッ

無外流秋山

DAIJIRO'S EMPTY DOJO HAD A VISITOR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE CONTEST IN EDO.

THANK YOU!
...AND WAS PROFOUNDLY IMPRESSED. THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.
MY NAME IS SHIROBEI OHGAKI. I WITNESSED YOUR SUPERB SKILL AT THE CONTEST SPONSORED BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE OTHER DAY...

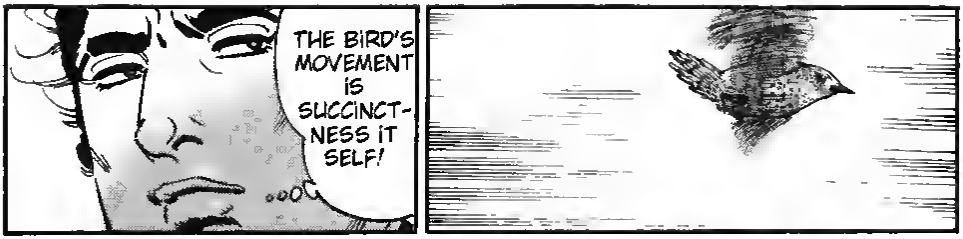
I'M FLATTERED.

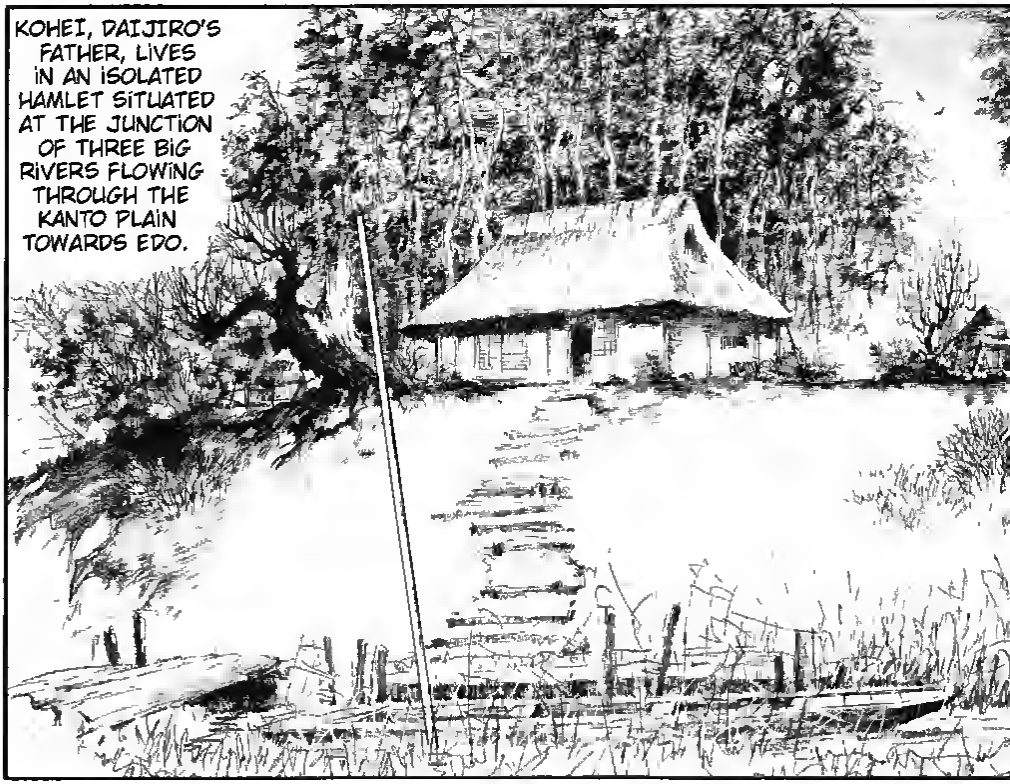
A MIRACULOUS WIELDING OF THE SWORD!
QUICK AND SLICK!

WELL!
...IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN.
I'VE GOT A SPECIAL REQUEST TO SUBMIT FOR YOUR KIND CONSIDER-ATION...
不二楼
...WHAT YOU ARE HERE FOR.
PLEASE, TELL ME...
DO YOU WANT ME TO TAKE PART IN ANOTHER CONTEST?
...ON YOUR SUPERB SKILL.
THE SUCCESS OF OUR OPERATION HINGES...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
A SORT OF, BUT NOT QUITE.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO KILL HIM. JUST BREAK HIS ARM.
A SWORDS MATCH MAY BE STAGED, BUT THAT'S NOT A NECES-SITY.
!
BLUNTLY PUT, WE WANT YOU TO BREAK AN ARM OF A SWORDS-MAN.

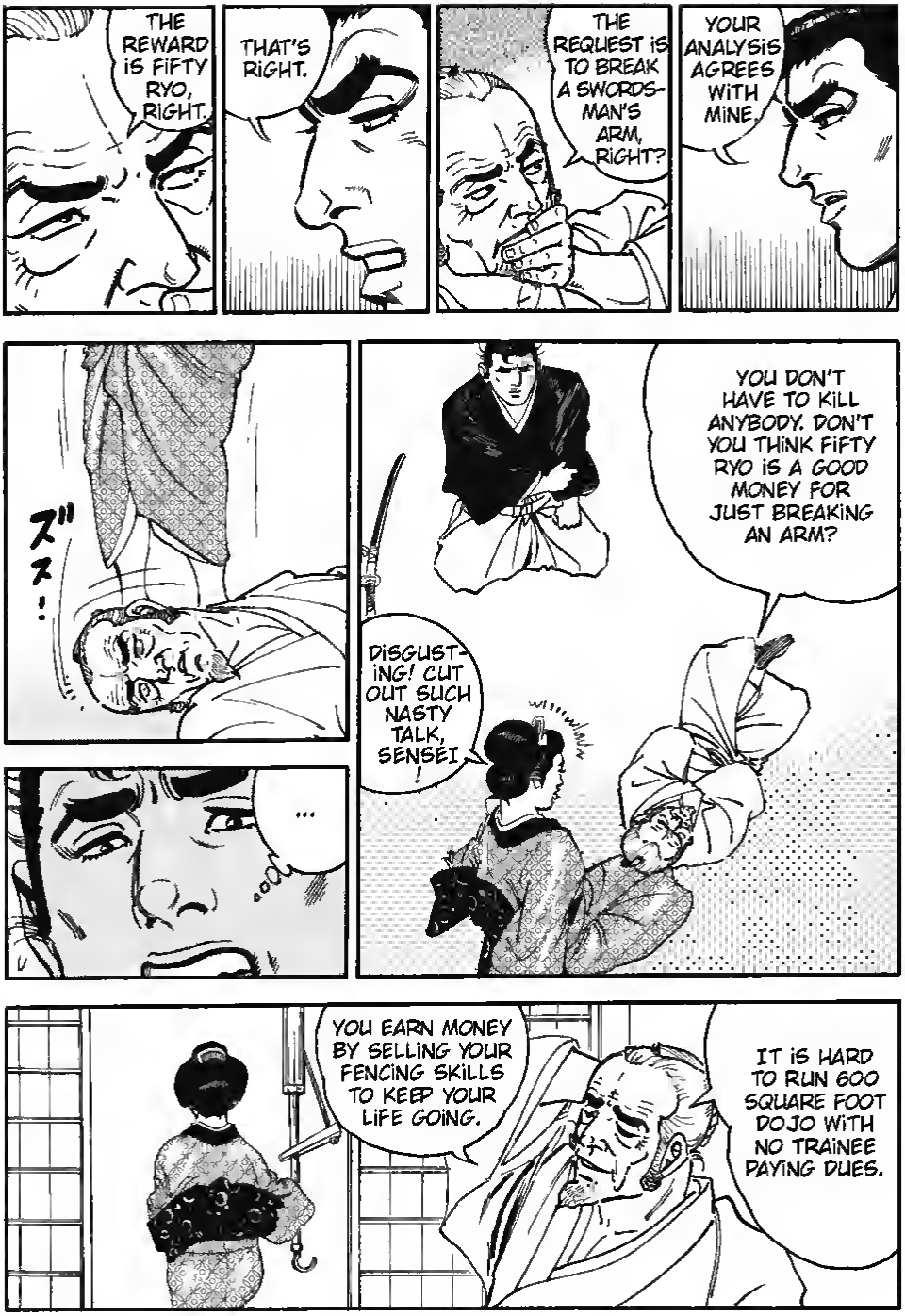
THE CONFIDENTIALITY INVOLVED EPITOMISES THE JUMBO REWARD.
WE CANNOT DIVULGE THE NAME OF YOUR TARGET, YET.
I'VE GOT FIFTY RYO IN GOLD TO PAY YOU IN ADVANCE FOR THE SERVICE.
I CAN DO IT IN MY WAY, THEN.
I CANNOT THINK OF ANY SWORDSMAN WHOSE ARM IS THIS EXPENSIVE.
PLEASE GIVE ME THE NAME OF THE SWORDSMAN.
THEN I HAVE TO TURN DOWN THE OFFER.
I PRAY YOU THINK IT OVER...
...AND GIVE US YOUR REPLY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

THE NEXT DAY, DAIJIRO TOOK THE TROUBLE OF SEEKING ADVICE OF HIS RETIRED FATHER LIVING IN A HAMLET CALLED TERASHIMA BEYOND THE BIG RIVER SUMIDA.


THE BIRD'S MOVEMENT IS SUCCINCT-NESS IT SELF!


KOHEI, DAIJIRO'S FATHER, LIVES IN AN ISOLATED HAMLET SITUATED AT THE JUNCTION OF THREE BIG RIVERS FLOWING THROUGH THE KANTO PLAIN TOWARDS EDO.

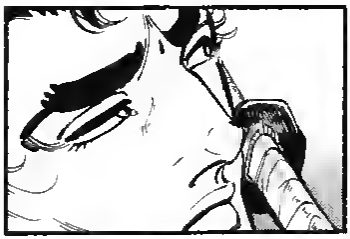
ARE YOU GOING TO IGNORE MY PLEA?
IN VIEW OF THE PECULIAR NATURE OF THE OFFER, I THOUGHT IT'S BEST TO SEEK YOUR ADVICE.
SHIROBEI OHGAKI IS THE NAME OF THE GUY WHO VISITED YOU, RIGHT?
OH, NO!
DO YOU KNOW HIM?
THAT IS CORRECT.
I'M GLAD THAT YOU SPOTTED THE NAME OF THE BOAT HOUSE.
...THE NAME OF A BOAT HOUSE ON THE RIVER SUMIDA
THE GUY WAS CARRYING A LANTERN MARKED FUJIRO...
...I DON'T REALLY.
NO,...
HE MOORED HIS BOAT AT THE FUJIRO WHARF AND RENTED A FREE LANTERN.
THE GUY CAME TO YOU IN A PRIVATE ROW BOAT, NOT THE RIVER FERRY.
SWORDSMEN SHOULD BE OBSERVANT.

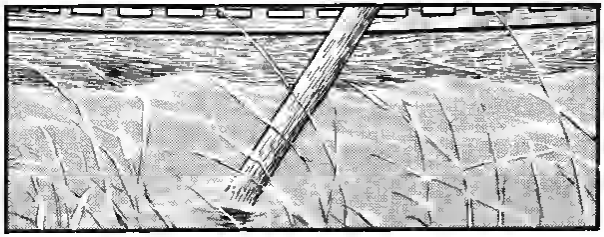

THE REWARD IS FIFTY RYO, RIGHT.
THAT'S RIGHT.
THE REQUEST IS TO BREAK A SWORDSMAN'S ARM, RIGHT?
YOUR ANALYSIS AGREES WITH MINE.
ズズ！
YOU DON'T HAVE TO KILL ANYBODY. DON'T YOU THINK FIFTY RYO IS A GOOD MONEY FOR JUST BREAKING AN ARM?
DISGUSTING! CUT OUT SUCH NASTY TALK, SENSEI!
...
YOU EARN MONEY BY SELLING YOUR FENCING SKILLS TO KEEP YOUR LIFE GOING.
IT IS HARD TO RUN 600 SQUARE FOOT DOJO WITH NO TRAINEE PAYING DUES.

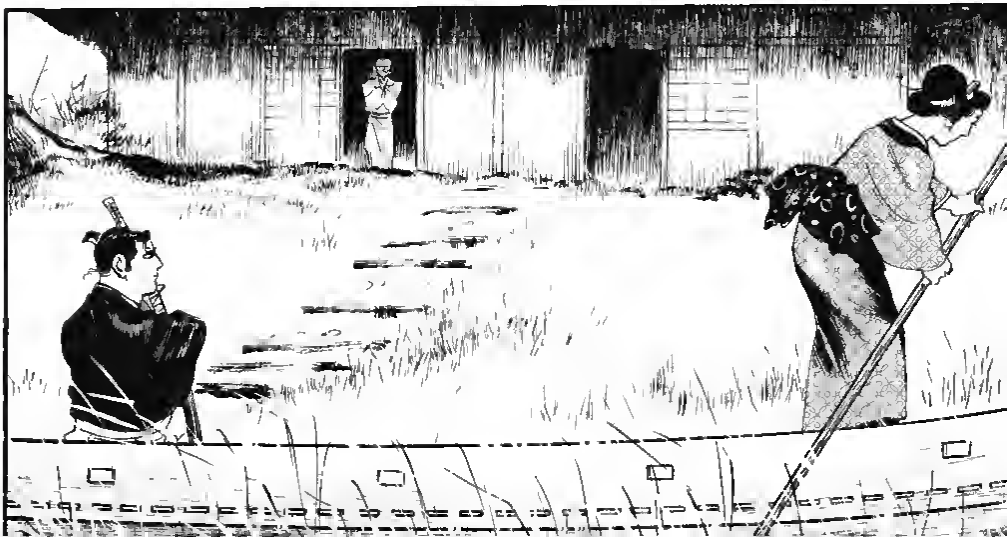
...
EVENTUALLY, A ZERO INCOME LEADS YOU TO STARVATION.
AN IMPRESSIVE PHYSIQUE, BUT HIS MIND BEGS A LOT MORE LEARNING.
HERE IS YOUR TEA, DAIJIRO-SAMA.
THANK YOU.
YES, SEN-SEI.
TAKE DAIJIRO BACK A-CROSS THE RIVER IN MY LITTLE BOAT, OHARU.
TAKE CARE.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ADVICE AND BEAUTIFUL TEA, FATHER.

OHARU, THE FATHER'S SERVANT AND SEX PARTNER, IS THE OARSMAN.

KOHEI'S ROWBOAT IS MOORED ON A TRIBUTARY OF THE SUMIDA RIVER.

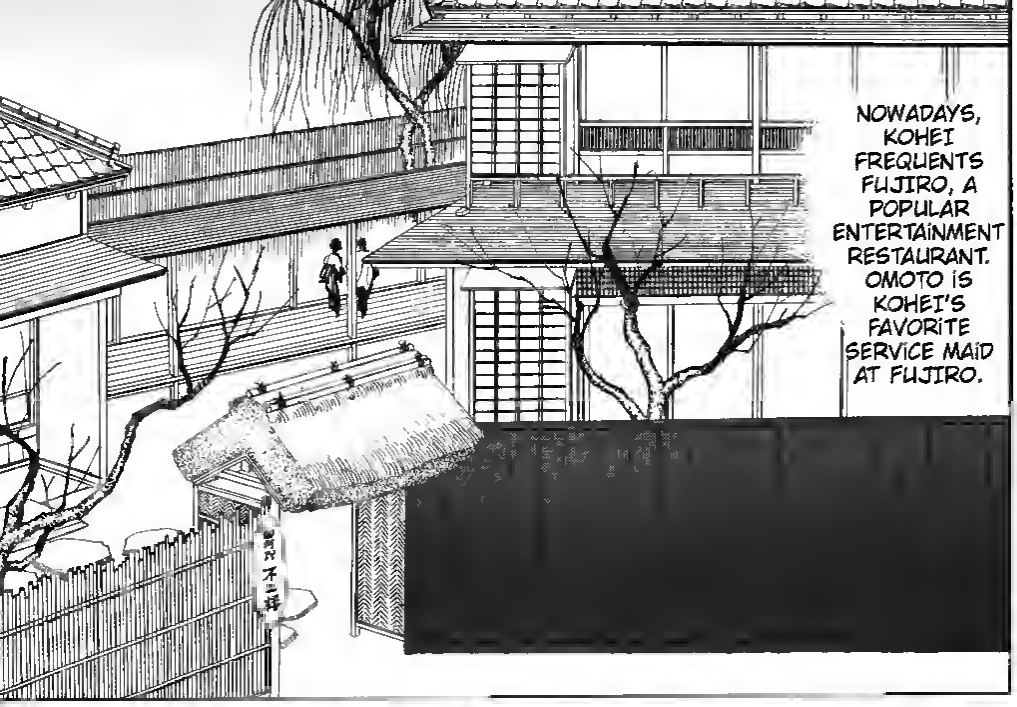






HOW OLD ARE YOU OHARU?
NINE-TEEN.
YES.
YOU HAVE BEEN SERVING FATHER FOR TWO YEARS NOW, RIGHT?

YOU KNOW THAT THE NEW SERVANT OHARU...
WHEN MY FATHER CAME TO SEE ME A FEW MONTHS AGO HE CONFIDED WITH ME.
...
AGE HAS SHIFTED MY INTEREST FROM SWORDSMANSHIP TO SEXUAL PERFORMANCE.
WHAT A DEPLORABLE CHANGE!
!
...IS NOW MY SEX PARTNER, AS WELL. I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT I JUST WANTED THE FACT WITH YOU.

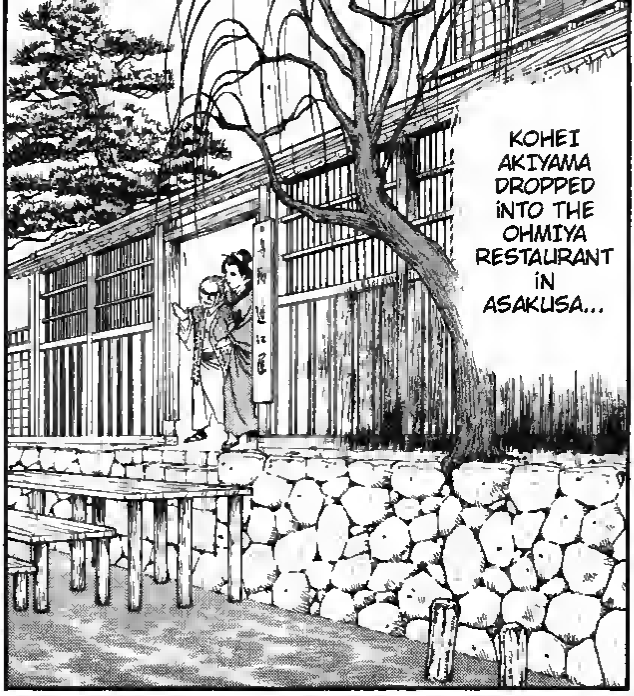

NOWADAYS, KOHEI FREQUENTS FUJIRO, A POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT RESTAURANT. OMOTO IS KOHEI'S FAVORITE SERVICE MAID AT FUJIRO.

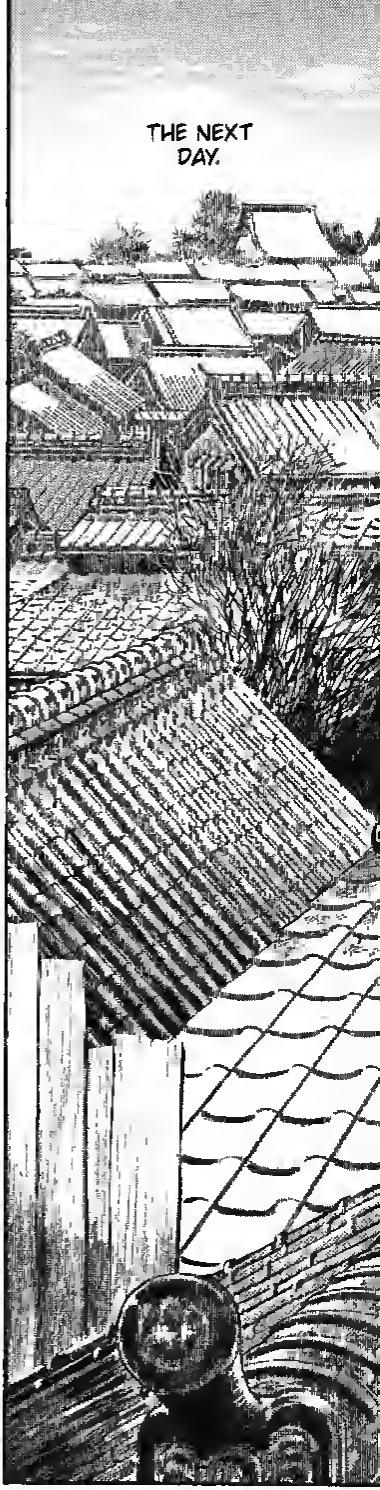
A LOT OF YOUR NEIGHBORORS SPOTTED YOU STROLLING AROUND YOUR HOUSE HAND IN HAND WITH A YOUNG LADY.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?
RETIRED AS YOU ARE, I HEAR THAT YOU ARE ACTIVE AFTER RETIRING TO BED.

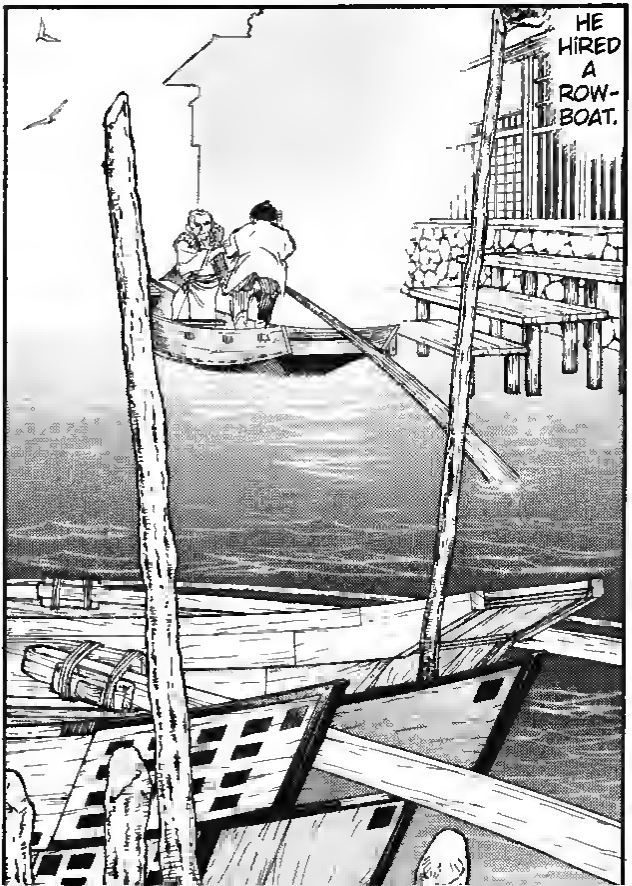
YOU HAD BETTER THINK OF YOUR AGE.
I WOULD NOT DENY THAT.

THAT'S AN AMAZING OBSER-VATION.
...ADD TO APPRECIATE A BUD TURNING INTO A FLOWER IS QUITE ANOTHER.
AGE IS ONE THING, FOR SURE...
!
JUST ANSWER THIS SERIOUS QUESTION OF MINE.
PUTTING LITERA-TURE GAME ASIDE
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
LAST NIGHT, A WELL-BUILT FORTYISH SAMURAI WITH A DISTINCT BLACK MOLE ON THE NOSE RIDGE DROPPED INTO YOUR PLACE, RIGHT?
HE JUST DROPPED BY...
HE WAS A CHANCE CUSTOMER WHO CAME BY A ROWBOAT OWNED BY THE OHMIYA RESTAURANT OF ASAKUSA.
I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHERE HE IS FROM.
THEN, WALKED OUT OF FUJIRO FOR A HALF AN HOUR...
...FOR A QUICK DRINK.
...

YOU ARE JUST AMAZ-ING!
AND ALSO TO GIVE YOU BACK THE LANTERN HE HAD RENTED, RIGHT?
...BEFORE COMING BACK FOR THE CHECK.
AND THEN WHERE DID HE GO?
I SEE.
...AND JUST LEFT.
HE GOT BACK ON BOARD OHMIYA'S BOAT...
...CARESSING THIS CURVY BODY OF YOURS EVERY NIGHT?
INCIDENTALLY, WHO IS THE LUCKY BASTARD...
YOU DIRTY LECHER !
IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG ?
POUR ME SAKE, OMOTO.
NO, I JUST WANTED TO KNOW.


KOHEI AKIYAMA DROPPED INTO THE OHMIYA RESTAURANT IN ASAKUSA...


THE NEXT DAY.

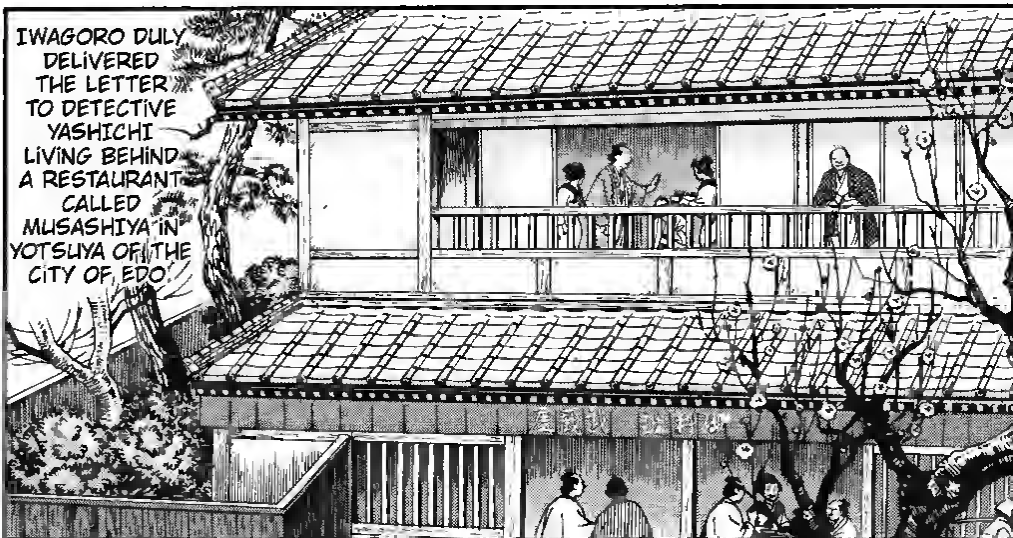

HE HIRED A ROW-BOAT.

YOU MEAN MR. OHYAMA?
HE IS WELL-BUILT WITH A BLACK MOLE ON THE NOSE RIDGE.
DIDN'T A SAMURAI OF ABOUT FORTY YEARS OF AGE HIRE YOUR BOAT THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY?
...AT AN ELBOW BENDING SESSION
A FEW YEARS AGO, WE GOT INTRODUCED TO EACH OTHER...
I'M SURE THAT WAS HIS NAME.
YAH, THAT'S RIGHT!
OH-YAMA?
HE IS AN ELITE HATAMOTO.
YAH I KNOW, SIR NAGAI IS A MINISTER, EMPLOYED BY THE SHOGUNATE GOVERNMENT FOR 5,000 KOKU A YEAR.
ﾈｰ...
MR.OHYAMA WORKS FOR SIR IZUMI NAGAI.

YOUR MASTER'S LETTER WILL BE DELIVERED WITHOUT FALL.

THE NEXT DAY, IWAGORO, OHARU'S FATHER LIVING IN SEKIYA VILLAGE, WAS SUMMONED, TO DELIVER KOHEI'S LETTER TO YASHICHI, A SHOGUNATE'S DETECTIVE.

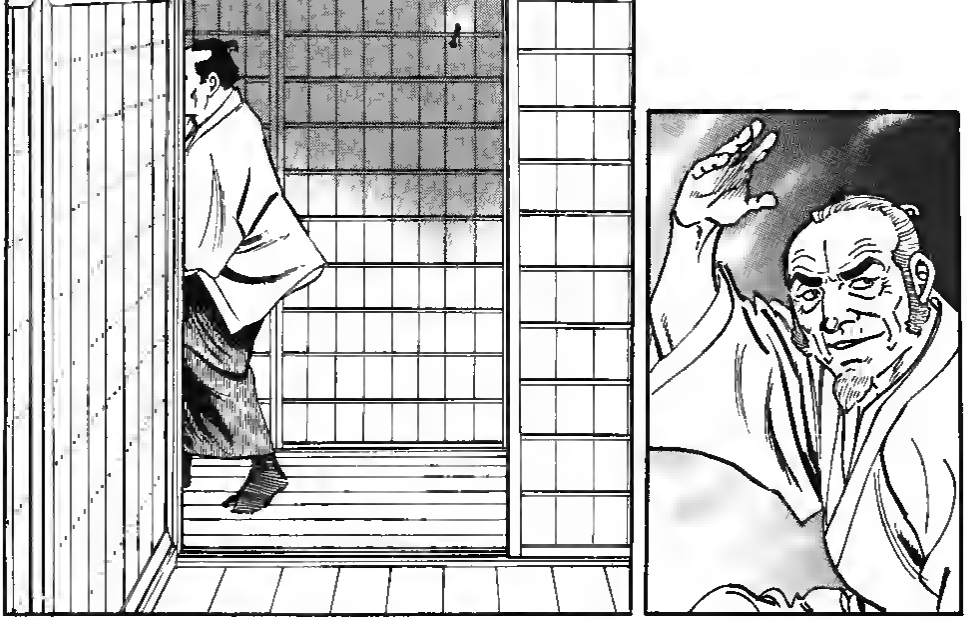
THAT'S BEYOND MY COMPRE-HENSION.
HOW CAN THAT SKINNY OLD MAN AFFORD SUCH AN IMPRESSIVE ABOD WITH A SERVANT.


IWAGORO DULY DELIVERED THE LETTER TO DETECTIVE YASHICHI LIVING BEHIND A RESTAURANT CALLED MUSASHIYA IN YOTSUYA OF THE CITY OF EDO.

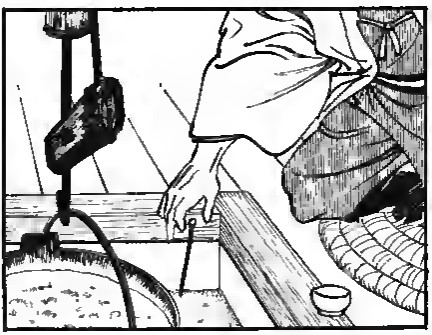
...THAT YASHICHI WILL COME VISIT HIM WITHOUT UNDUE DELAY.
TELL THE RESPECT-ABLE KOHEI AKIYAMA...
THE CONTENTS HAVE DULY BEEN NOTED.
YASHICHI IS THE OWNWER OF THE RESTAURANT AND HIS WIFE RUNS THE RESTAURANT.
I REALLY APPRE-CIATE YOUR PROMPT REACTION.
IT WAS DARK ALREADY. BUT I DROPPED EVERYTHING TO COME HERE.

I KNOW THIS IS SHORT OF WHAT YOU MAY CALL GOOD RECEPTION, BUT MY GIRL SERVANT IS ON LEAVE TODAY.
FIRST OF ALL, RELAX BY TAKING THIS GOLDEN LIQUID I SERVE YOU..
TELL ME, SENSEI, WHAT EXACTLY IS ON YOUR MIND?
FISHY SMELL IS IN THE AIR.
ON THE OTHER HAND, I DON'T WANT TO SEE HIS TALENT SQUANDERED BY SOME SINISTER SCHEMES.
NOW I HAVE GIVEN THAT YOU THE WHOLE STORY. MY HONEST FEELING IS THAT MY SON SHOULD TAKE THE JOB.
ALL RIGHT, LET ME CHECK IT OUT.
I AGREE WITH YOU, SENSEI. A HATAMOTO CALLED NAGAI IS ORIGINALLY FROM MOTOTORIGOE, I UNDERSTAND
YOU ARE MY MAN.
I CERTAINLY APPRECIATE YOUR HELP.
YES, BUT HIS DE FACTO RESIDENCE IS IN FUKAGAWA OF EDO CITY.

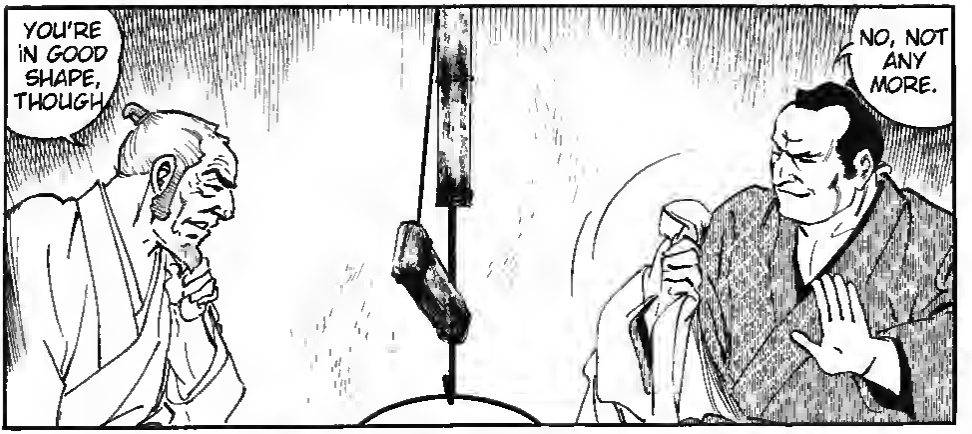
EXCUSE ME FOR A MINUTE.
ヒュン
カ
ヒュッ!



HE STILL IS ON THE BALL.
...
YASHICHI USED TO BE ONE OF THE TOP-NOTCH TRAINEES WHEN KOHEI WAS RUNNING A DOJO IN YOTSUYA.

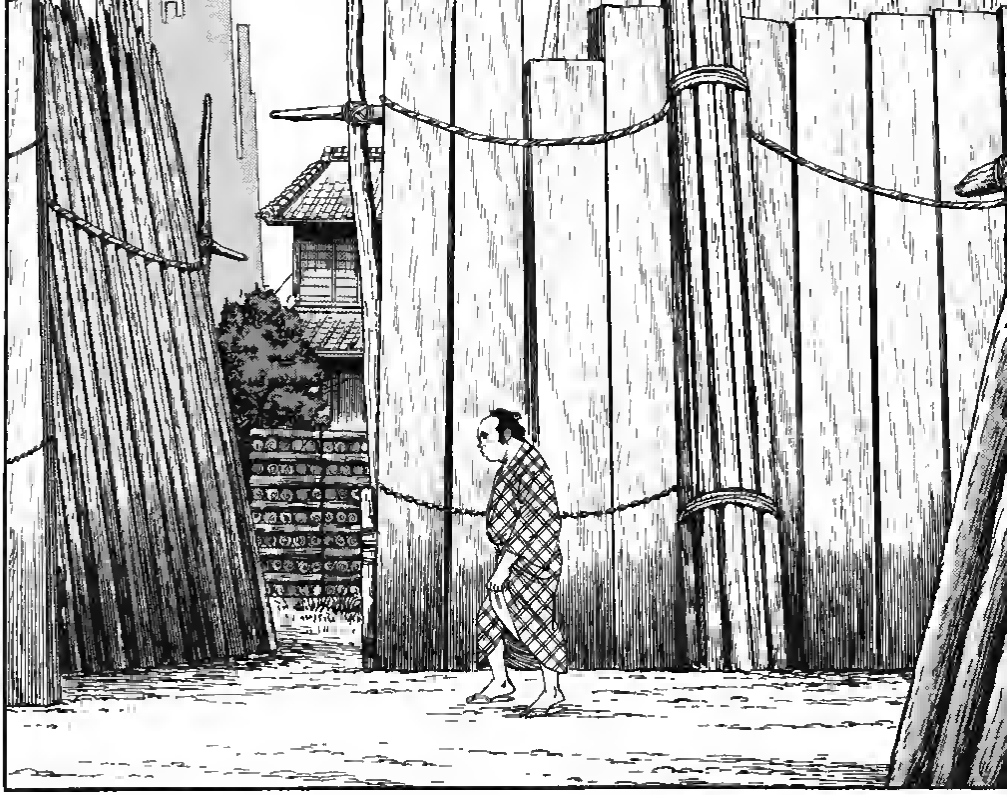


YOU STILL FREQUENT SOME DOJO IN EDO?


YOU'RE IN GOOD SHAPE, THOUGH.
NO, NOT ANY MORE.

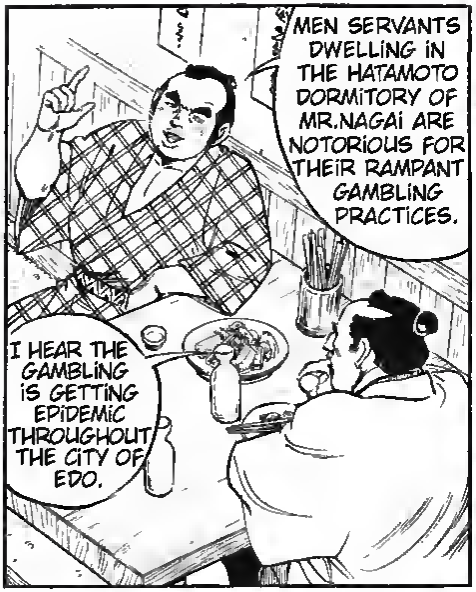
I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT.

...NAMELY, ALERTNESS IS THE ESSENCE OF LIFE.
THAT MAY BE BECAUSE YOUR WORDS ARE STILL RINGING LOUD IN MY EARS...

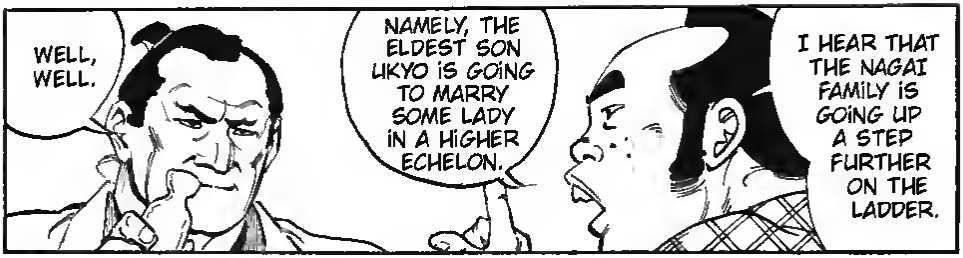


I'M AT YOUR SERVICE, BIG MAN.
THERE IS SOMETHING I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.

HOW-DI.
KAKEZO, MY FRIEND.
Hi, THE BIG MAN OF MUSASHIYA.

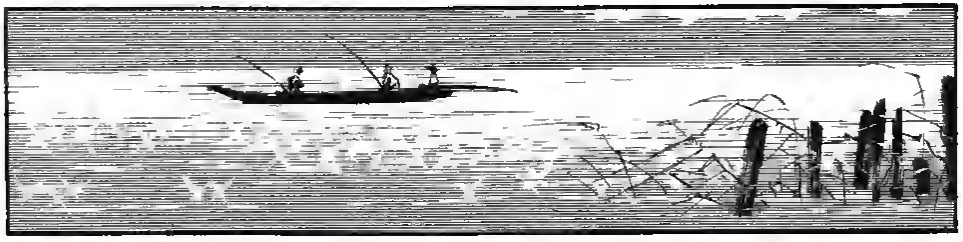

MEN SERVANTS DWELLING IN THE HATAMOTO DORMITORY OF MR.NAGAI ARE NOTORIOUS FOR THEIR RAMPANT GAMBLING PRACTICES.
I HEAR THE GAMBLING IS GETTING EPIDEMIC THROUGHOUT THE CITY OF EDO.

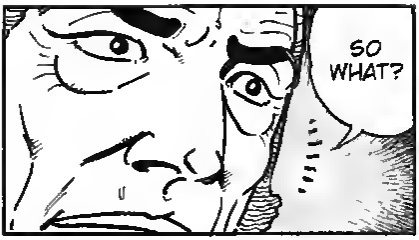
御料理
御茶漬


WELL, WELL.
NAMELY, THE ELDEST SON IJKYO IS GOING TO MARRY SOME LADY IN A HIGHER ECHELON.
I HEAR THAT THE NAGAI FAMILY IS GOING UP A STEP FURTHER ON THE LADDER.

WELL, THAT'S INTER-ESTING!

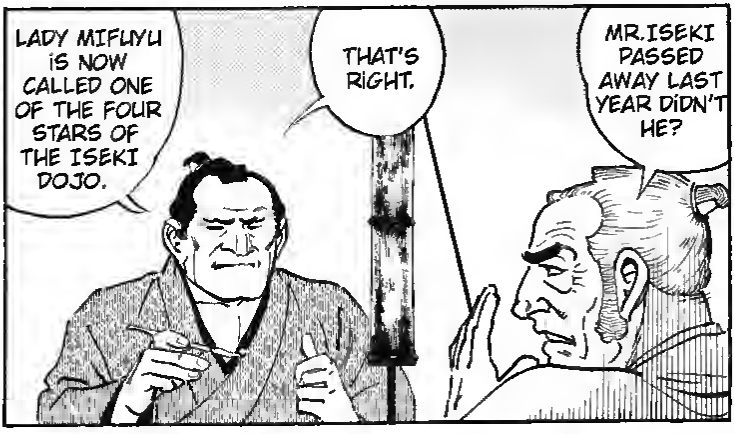
...THAT THE LADY IS ONE OF PRIME MINISTER OKITSUGU TANUMA'S ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN.
THROUGH THE GRAPE-VINES I HEAR...

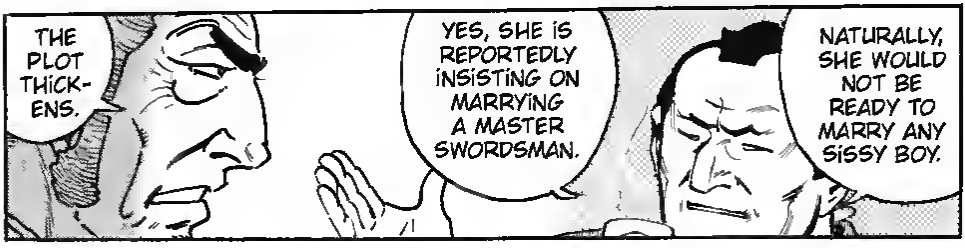



SO WHAT?

FEMININE AS SHE IS, SHE IS ONE OF THE TOP NOTCH SWORDS FIGHTERS OF THE ISEKI DOJO.
THAT ILLEGITIMATE DAUGHTER OF THE PRIME MINISTER IS NAMED MIFUYU SASAKI.

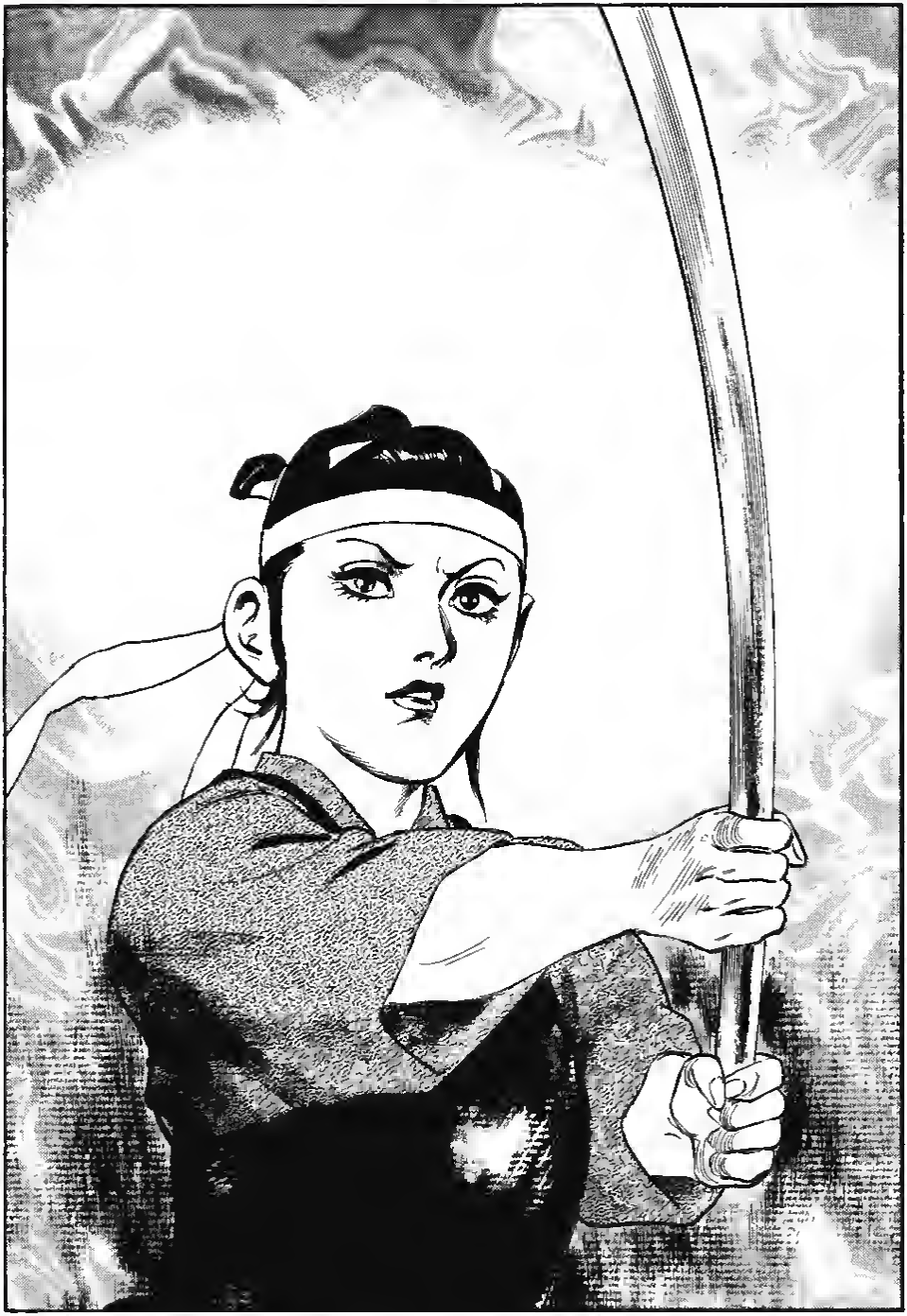
A LADY MUSKETEER! THAT'S QUITE A PHENOM-ENON.

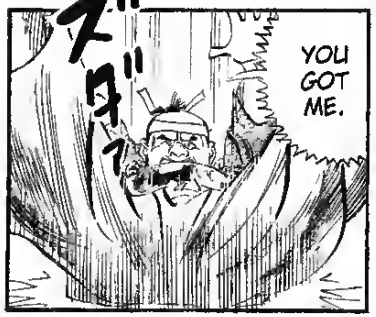

LADY MIFUYU IS NOW CALLED ONE OF THE FOUR STARS OF THE ISEKI DOJO.
THAT'S RIGHT.
MR.ISEKI PASSED AWAY LAST YEAR DIDN'T HE?

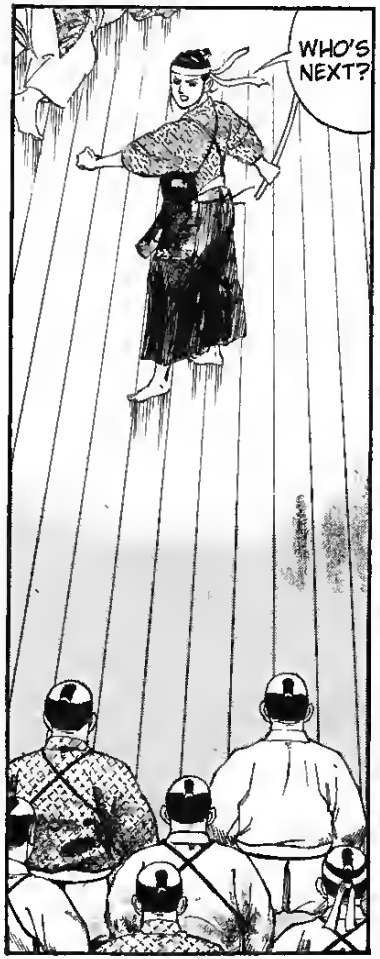

THE PLOT THICK-ENS.
YES, SHE IS REPORTEDLY INSISTING ON MARRYING A MASTER SWORDSMAN.
NATURALLY, SHE WOULD NOT BE READY TO MARRY ANY SISSY BOY.

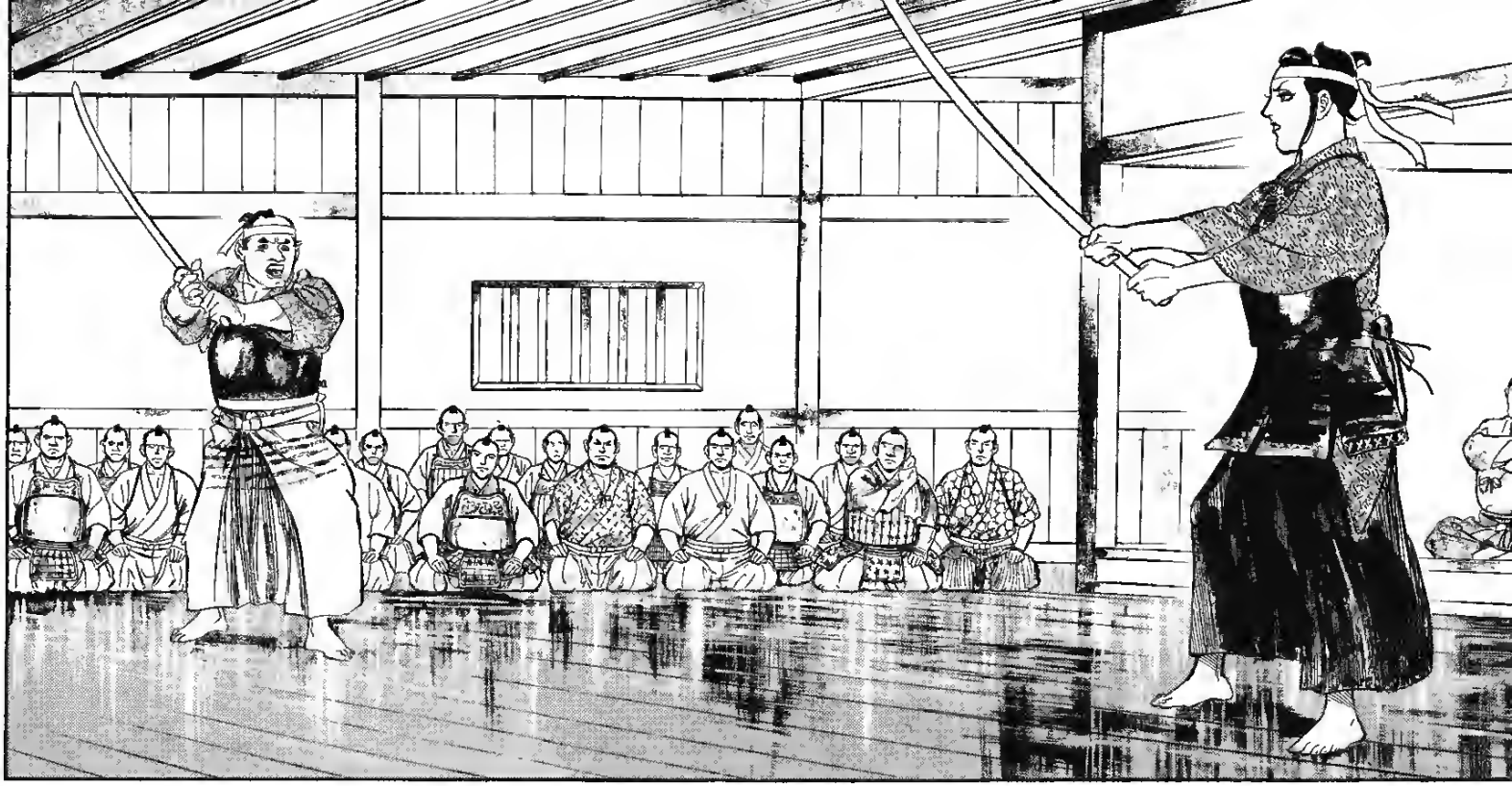
HOW GOOD IS NAGAI'S SON IN SWORDS FIGHTING SKILL.
CONSEQUENTLY, UKYO NAGAI MUST BEAT THE LADY IN A SWORD MATCH TO BE QUALIFIED AS THE BRIDEGROOM.
SHE IS QUITE A PHENOMENAL LADY.
MY INFORMER TAKEZO TELLS ME...
...THE SON APPARENTLY HAS DIFFICULTY EVEN IN CARRYING A FULL-SCARED SWORD AROUND THE WAIST.
THE FATHER NAGAI FACES A CONUN-DRUM.
CONSE-QUENTLY ...
A LOT OF YOUNG SAMURAI'S ARE GETTING SISSY NOW-A-DAYS.
SO THEY ATTEMPTED TO HIRE MY SON TO BREAK THE ARM OF THIS LADY MIFUYU.
THAT'S THE WAY I ANALYZE THE WHOLE SITUA-TION.
ON THE OTHER HAND A SUCCESSFUL MATRIMONIAL WOULD ENSURE THE NAGAI FAMILY AN EXTENSIVE NEPOTISTIC FAVOR.
YES, SHE HAS TO BE PHYSICALLY DISQUALIFIED FOR THE MATCH.
C'EST LA VIE.

YOU ARE THE BRAIN TO WORK IT OUT, SENSEI.
HOW CAN YOU ABORT THE WHOLE SHENANIGAN ?
THEN MIFUYU HAS NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO MARRY UKYO NAGAI DESPITE HER WISHES.
THAT'S THE WAY THINGS USUALLY WORK.
...SOME OTHER SWORDS-MAN TO DO THE JOB.
SHOULD MY SON DECLINE, THEY WOULD GO TO...
I'M THINKING HARD.




ズヴヴ
YOU GOT ME.


WHO'S NEXT?



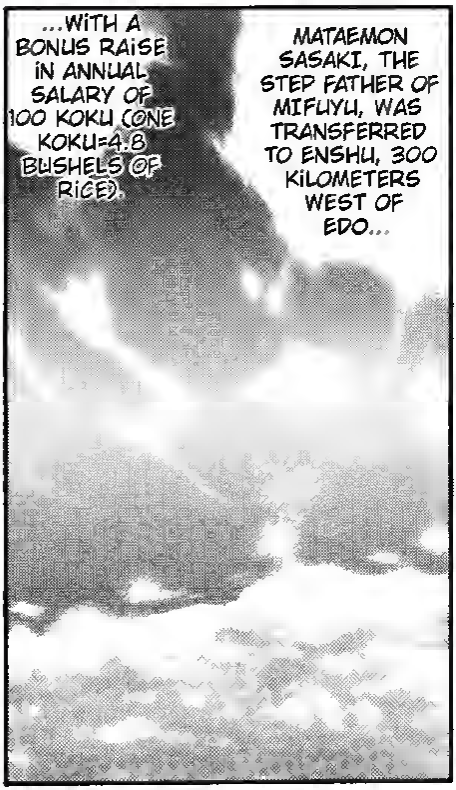
WHAA--!

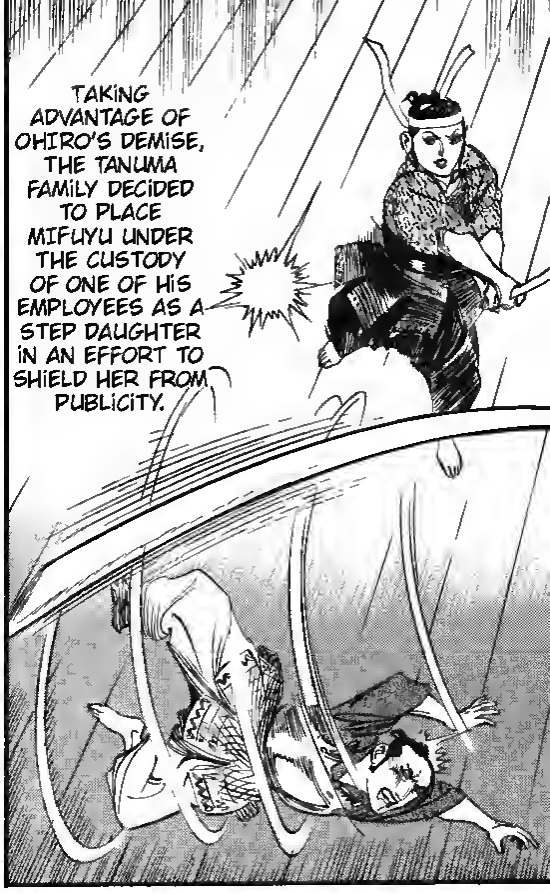
COME!

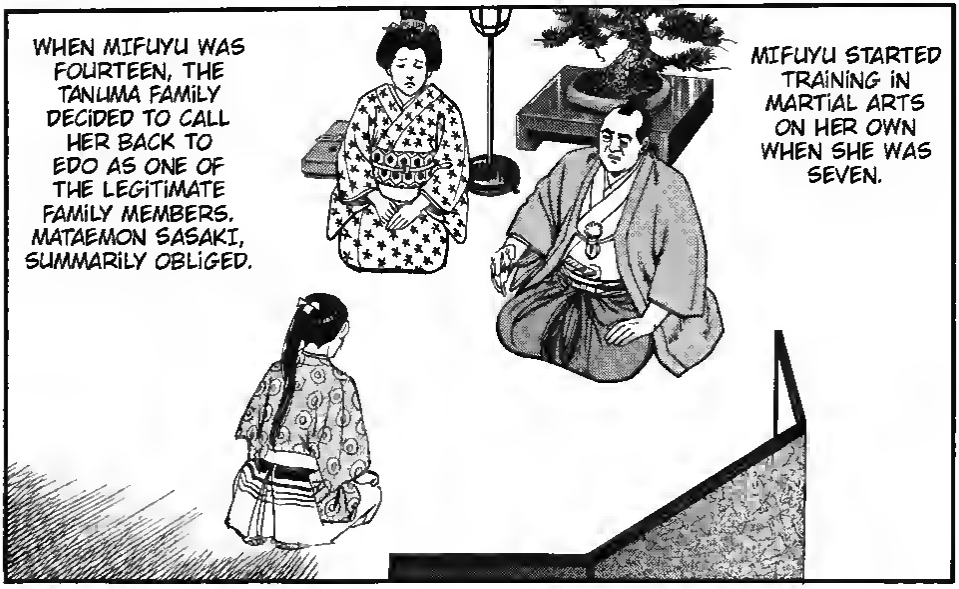
THE ISEKI DOJO, SITUATED IN ICHIGAYA, CLOSE TO THE SHOGUNATE'S MAIN CASTLE, IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR DOJO'S WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF TRAINEES.

LET THIS OLD MAN HAVE A PEAK INSIDE OF THE DOJO KIDS!

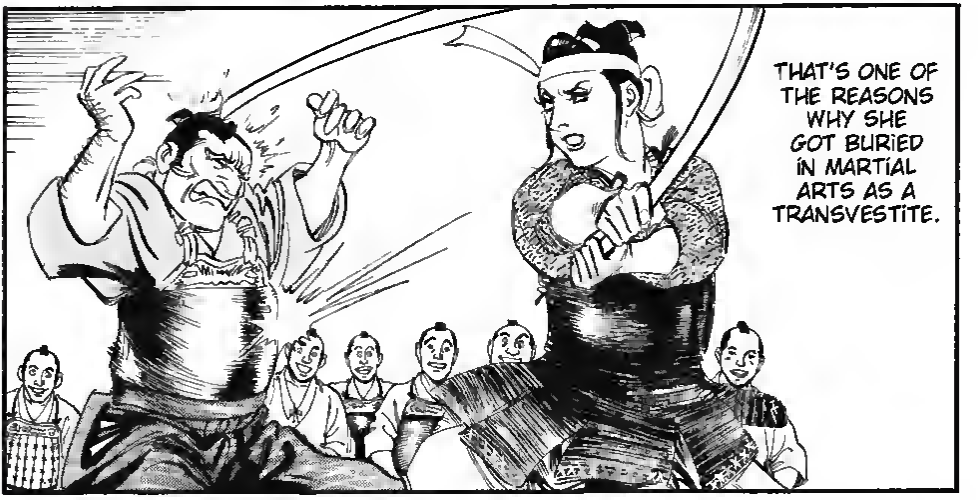
THAT MUST BE THE LADY MIFUYU WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT. SHE IS A TOUGH TRAINER, BUT THAT'S JUST A WARM UP EXERCISE FOR HER.
THERE THEY GO!
A CHAMBER MAID CALLED OHIRO SERVING THE PRIME MINISTER TANUMA GAVE BIRTH TO MIFUYU IN 1759.
ASSISTANT TREASURER OKITSUGU TANUMA ACHIEVED A METEORIC RISE TO THE PREMIERSHIP DURING THE REIGN OF SHOGUN IESHIGE, THE FATHER OF THE INCUMBENT.
THE TRAINING IS TOUGH, BUT A FEMININE WOOD SWORD HIT GIVES YOU A MASOCHISTIC PLEASURE, MAN!
...AND DIED A LONELY DEATH INCOGNITO A YEAR LATER IN HER NATIVE PLACE.
SOON AFTER THE BIRTH, OHIRO WAS ORDERED TO GO BACK TO HER NATIVE PLACE LEAVING THE NEW-BORN GIRL BABY BEHIND...

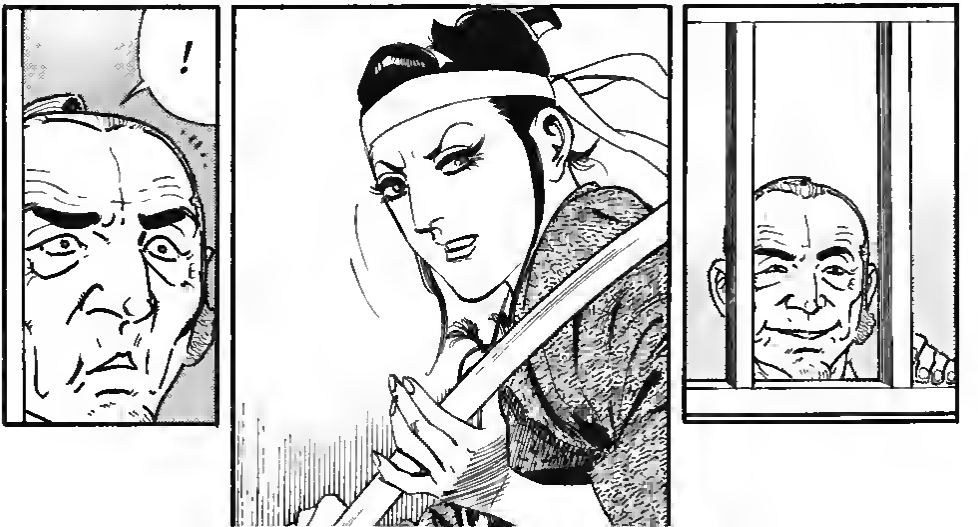

...WITH A BONUS RAISE IN ANNUAL SALARY OF 100 KOKU (ONE KOKU=4.8 BUSHELS OF RICE).
MATAEMON SASAKI, THE STEP FATHER OF MIFUYU, WAS TRANSFERRED TO ENSHU, 300 KILOMETERS WEST OF EDO...


TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OHIRO'S DEMISE, THE TANUMA FAMILY DECIDED TO PLACE MIFUYU UNDER THE CUSTODY OF ONE OF HIS EMPLOYEES AS A STEP DAUGHTER IN AN EFFORT TO SHIELD HER FROM PUBLICITY.


WHEN MIFUYU WAS FOURTEEN, THE TANUMA FAMILY DECIDED TO CALL HER BACK TO EDO AS ONE OF THE LEGITIMATE FAMILY MEMBERS. MATAEMON SASAKI, SUMMARILY OBLIGED.
MIFUYU STARTED TRAINING IN MARTIAL ARTS ON HER OWN WHEN SHE WAS SEVEN.

MIFUYU, HOWEVER, REFUSED TO BE OPEN-MINDED TOWARDS THE TANUMA FAMILY.
OKITSUGU TANUMA, THE INCUMBENT PRIME MINISTER FORMERLY WELCOMED MIFUYU INTO THE FAMILY.

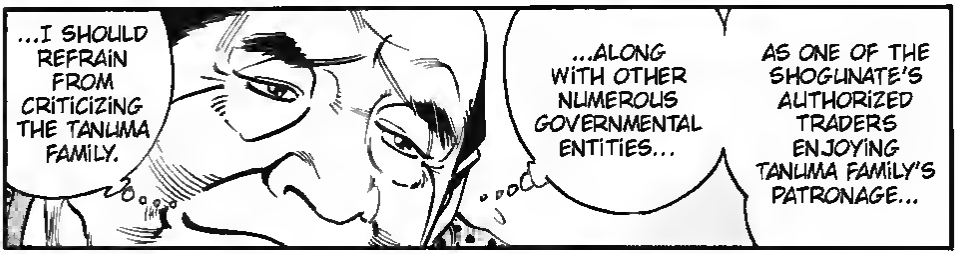

THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS WHY SHE GOT BURIED IN MARTIAL ARTS AS A TRANSVESTITE.


!

HER SWORD HANDLING SKILLS ARE OF A SUPERB QUALITY.
BUT HER PHYSICAL BEAUTY OVER-WHELMS SKILLS.
I WOULD LOVE TO SEE HIM ACT ON A KABUKI STAGE.
WHAT A CHARMING YOUNG SAMIRAI.
PAST NOON, MIFUYU WALKS BACK TO HER ABODE, CLAD IN A TYPICAL SAMURAI COSTUME.

IN ORDER TO AVOID CO-HABITATION WITH THE TANUMA FAMILY MEMBERS, MIFUYU CURRENTLY LIVES IN A DORMITORY PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYEES OF IZUMIYA, A BOOK WHOLE-SELLER, RUN BY A RELATIVE OF HER DECEASED MOTHER OHIRO.
TODAY MIFUYU DROPPED BY THE MAIN OFFICE OF IZUMIYA TO SAY HELLO TO HIS UNCLE, THE OWNER OF THE BUSINESS.
和泉屋
BE A BIT CAREFUL ABOUT RUMORS.
I HEAR THAT YOU ARE NEVER IN THE DORMITORY, HOVERING AROUND TOWN ALL THE TIME.
GO BACK TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S MANSION, THEN YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DINE OUT EVERY DAY.
OK, UNCLE, I'LL RUSH BACK TO THE DORMITORY IMMEDIATELY AFTER DINNER TODAY.
I HOPE THAT DAY WILL COME SOON.
ONCE THEY ARE CONSUMMATED I'VE GOT NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO JOIN MY FATHER.
MATRI-MONIAL ARRANGE-MENTS ARE UNDER WAY FOR ME.

...
UHU, HU HU.
THAT DAY WILL NEVER COME UNLESS THE WOULD BE BRIDEGROOM BEATS ME IN A SWORD MATCH.


...I SHOULD REFRAIN FROM CRITICIZING THE TANUMA FAMILY.
...ALONG WITH OTHER NUMEROUS GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES...
AS ONE OF THE SHOGUNATE'S AUTHORIZED TRADERS ENJOYING TANUMA FAMILY'S PATRONAGE...

MIFUYU WALKED THROUGH THE KURUMAZAKA STREET, RUNNING PARALLEL TO THE OSHU HIGHWAY LEADING TOWARDS THE CITY OF SENDAI 400 KILOMETERS NORTH OF EDO.
MIFUYU LEFT IZUMIYA TO DINE OUT AT ABOUT SEVEN.

ONCE YOU TURN LEFT TOWARD THE YODENJI TEMPLE, HOWEVER,...
THE OSHU HIGHWAY BEING ONE OF THE MAJOR TRAFFIC ROUTES OF JAPAN, THERE IS A HEAVY TRAFFIC OF PEOPLE, PALANQUINS AND HORSES GOING TO AND FRO EVEN AFTER DARK.

..DARKNESS PREVAILS, WITH NOBODY WALKING AROUND YOU.

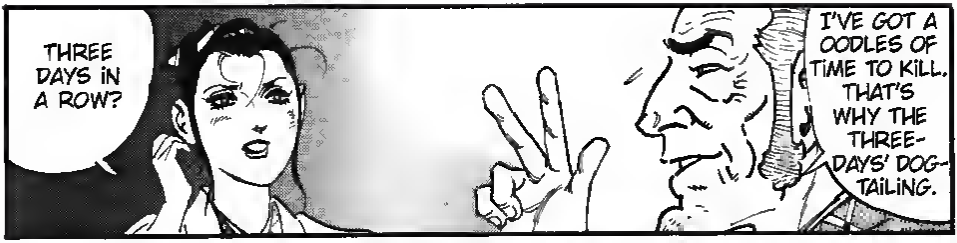
!!

WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE!
EXPOSE THE ARMS!
WHY THE ATTACK?
WHO HIRED YOU TO DO ALL THIS?

HELL!
HECK!
SHIT!
GOSH!

YOU BASTARD!
!!
MY NAME IS KOHEI AKIYAMA, IN CASE YOU WANT TO KNOW.
YOU ARE NO MATCH. BEAT IT!
BEAT IT!

YOU ARE LUCKY AS I HAPPENED TO BE DOG TAILING YOU.
...
A DISGRACEFUL BASTARDS! THEY HAVE LEFT AN UNCONSCIOUS COMRADE BEHIND.
THAT'S A HALF BAKED RESPONSE.
I GUESS I HAVE TO THANK YOU.
...
WHY THE SILENCE?
WHY THE DOG-TAILING ON YOUR PART, AFTER ALL?
YOU GAVE YOUR NAME TO THE ATTACKERS A MOMENT AGO, DIDN'T YOU?
HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU, MR.AKI-YAMA?

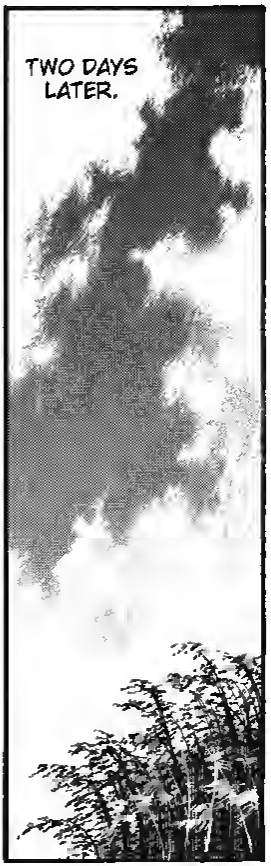

THREE DAYS IN A ROW?
I'VE GOT A OODLES OF TIME TO KILL. THAT'S WHY THE THREE-DAYS' DOG-TAILING.

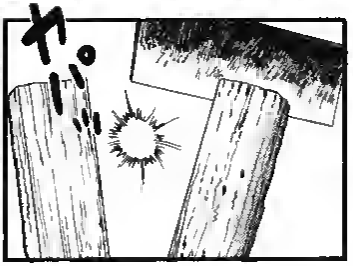
THANK YOU, MISTER AKIYAMA.
IT MAY START SNOWING ANY TIME. PLEASE HURRY HOME.
SUCH A DIEHARD LADY COULD NOT BE READY FOR MARRIAGE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

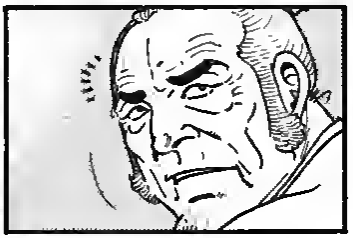
HOPE-FULLY, THE SNOW WILL NOT STAY.

HE IS RIGHT. IT STARTED TO SNOW.

KOHEI AKIYAMA WAS ALONE IN HIS COUNTRY SIDE ABODE AFTER DISPATCHING OHARU FOR AN ERRAND VISIT TO HIS SON'S DOJO IN ASAKUSA.

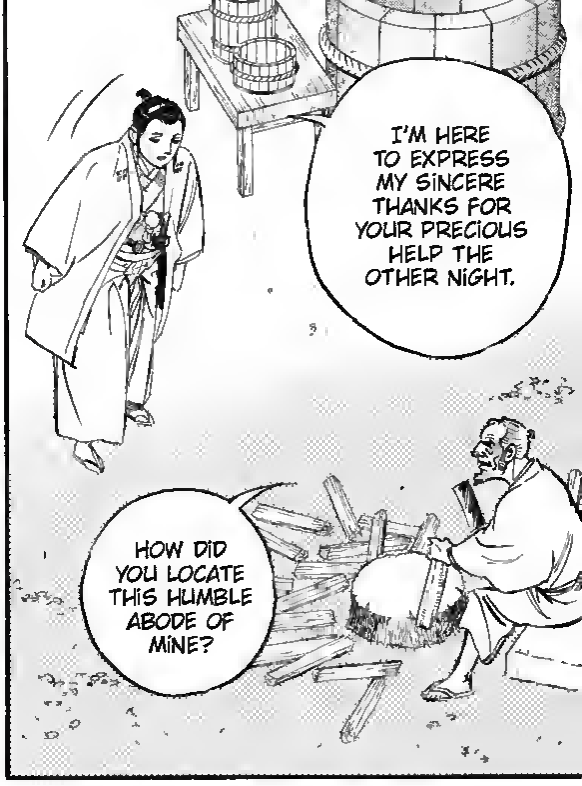

TWO DAYS LATER.

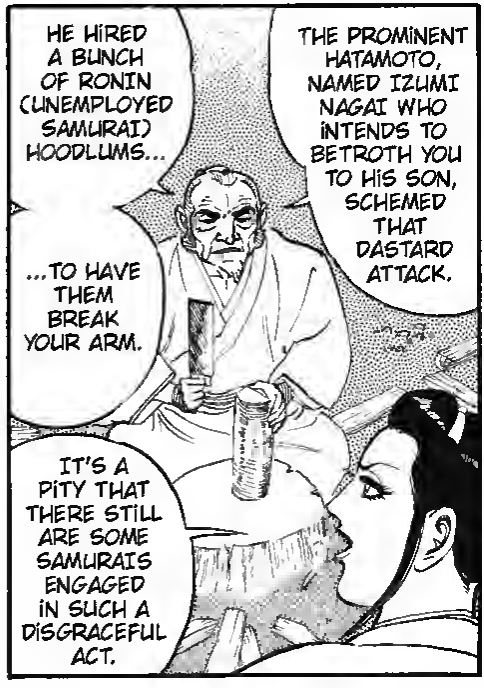




I WAS STUPID ENOUGH NOT TO SENSE THE THREAT IN THE AIR.
YOUR PRECIOUS NAME HAS BEEN INSCRIBED DEEER IN MY MIND I WAS THROWN INTO AN UTTERLY HEEDLESS SITUATION THAT NIGHT.

THAT WAS A GOOD LESSON FOR YOU.


I'M HERE TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE THANKS FOR YOUR PRECIOUS HELP THE OTHER NIGHT.
HOW DID YOU LOCATE THIS HUMBLE ABODE OF MINE?


HE HIRED A BUNCH OF RONIN (UNEMPLOYED SAMURAI) HOODLUMS...
THE PROMINENT HATAMOTO, NAMED IZUMI NAGAI WHO INTENDS TO BETROTH YOU TO HIS SON, SCHEMED THAT DASTARD ATTACK.
...TO HAVE THEM BREAK YOUR ARM.
IT'S A PITY THAT THERE STILL ARE SOME SAMURAIS ENGAGED IN SUCH A DISGRACEFUL ACT.

THAT IS SO TRUE!
A SWORDSMAN SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE FACT THAT A PEACEFUL WORLD HAS A DANGEROUS LINING.
カ

AGAINST MY RAILROADING FATHER.
I STILL HAVE INHIBI-TIONS...
HOW ABOUT RETURNING TO THE MANSION OF PRIME MINISTER TANUMA, YOUNG LADY.
TO ME, HE IS AN ABOMI-NABLE MONSTER.
YOU DON'T LIKE HIM?
...
SO YOU TURNED YOUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM POLITICS...
...
I DO NOT UNDER-STAND POLITICS.
REMEMBER POLITICS ARE NOT PAVED WITH TRUTH AND HONESTY ALL THE WAY THROUGH.
...
...AND PROBABLY FROM SEX, AS WELL?
OTHERWISE, WORLDLY WORRIES HAUNT YOU, RIGHT.
YES, THE MOMENT I READY MYSELF FOR A FENCING MATCH, ALL WORLDLY WORRIES ARE GONE.

MEN ARE ANI-MALS.
YOU ARE DIFFERENT THOUGH, MASTER AKIYAMA.
カコ…
…
YOUR SKILLS JUST MES-MERIZED ME.
YOU CAME TO MY RESCUE THE OTHER NIGHT AS SWORDSMAN, NOT AS A BIOLOGICAL MALE.
WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?

!!
THE HOODLUMS ARE HERE FOR A REVENGE.
GWAAH!

NOO... AH!
ZUM!
DWAA...!

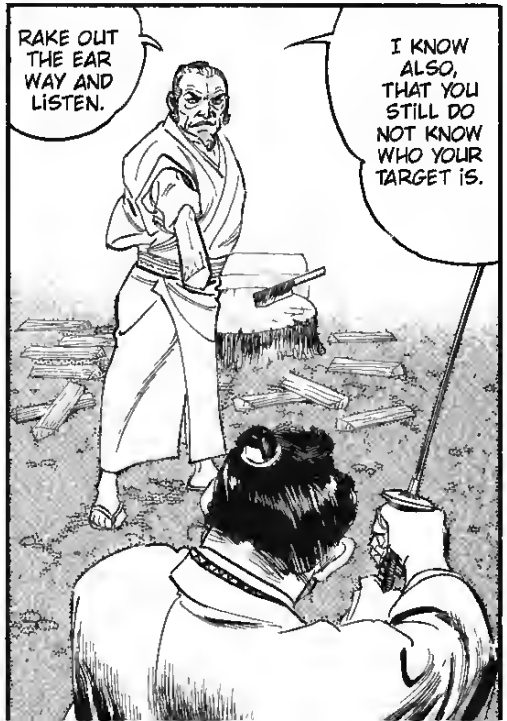
AA-
GOOH!
NU?
...WHO RUNS A DOJO IN YOTSUME OF HONJO.
YOU SHOULD BE TORAJIRO ASADA...

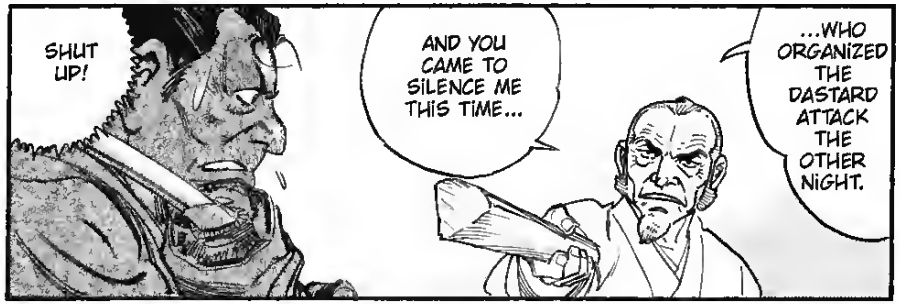
THE TARGET OF YOUR OTHER NIGHT'S ATTACK IS NAMED MIFUYU TANUMA.

SHE IS A DAUGHTER OF THE PRIME MINISTER TANUMA.

!!

A GUY I CAPTURED THE OTHER NIGHT SPITTED OUT THAT YOU ARE THE HEAD OF THE GANG...


RAKE OUT THE EAR WAY AND LISTEN.
I KNOW ALSO, THAT YOU STILL DO NOT KNOW WHO YOUR TARGET IS.


SHUT UP!
AND YOU CAME TO SILENCE ME THIS TIME...
...WHO ORGANIZED THE DASTARD ATTACK THE OTHER NIGHT.

I ALREADY KNOW WHO HIRED YOU.

YOU SHITTY BASTARD!

TELL ME THE NAME OF THE GUY BEHIND THE WHOLE GAME.

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WOH!

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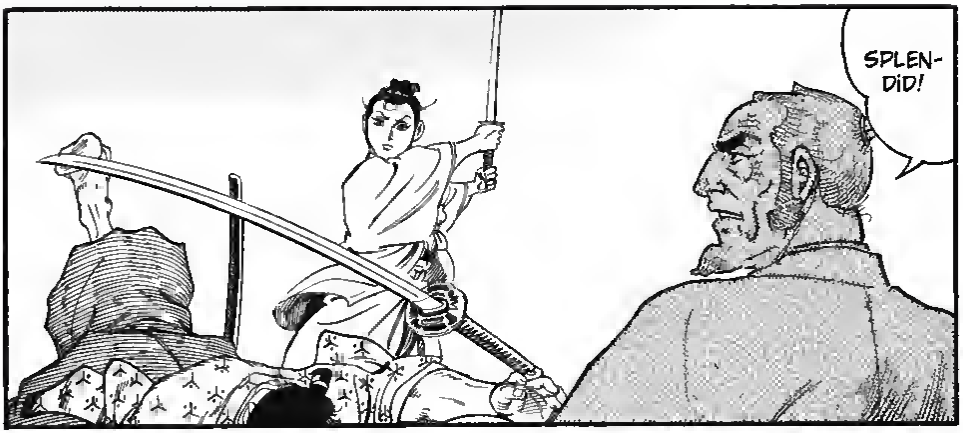
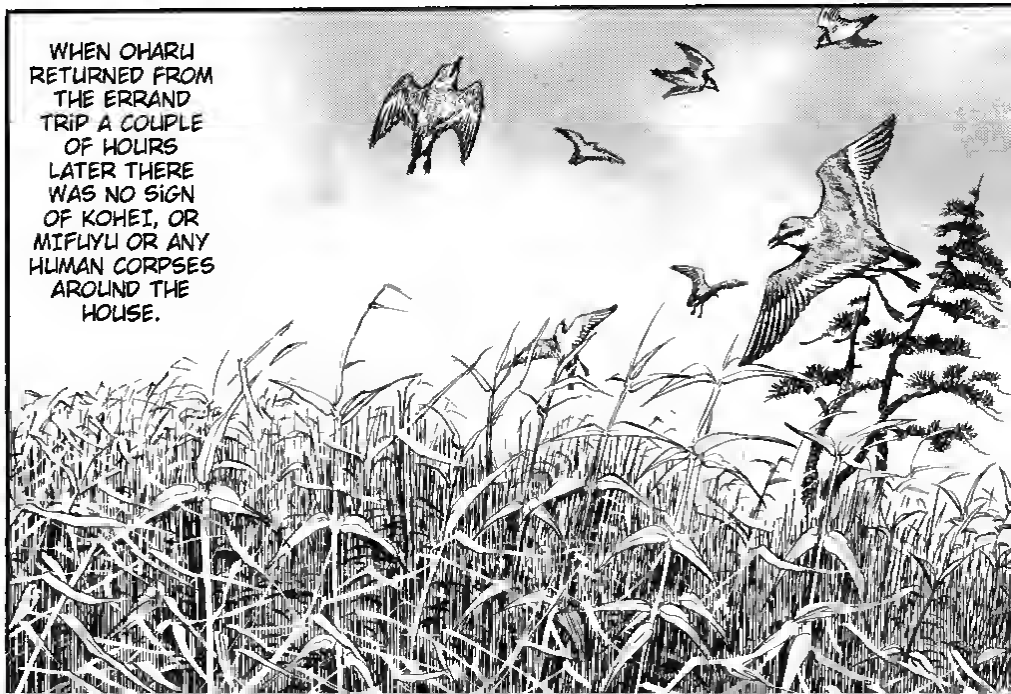
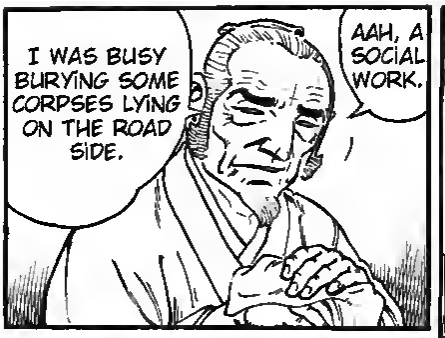

SPLEN-
DID!

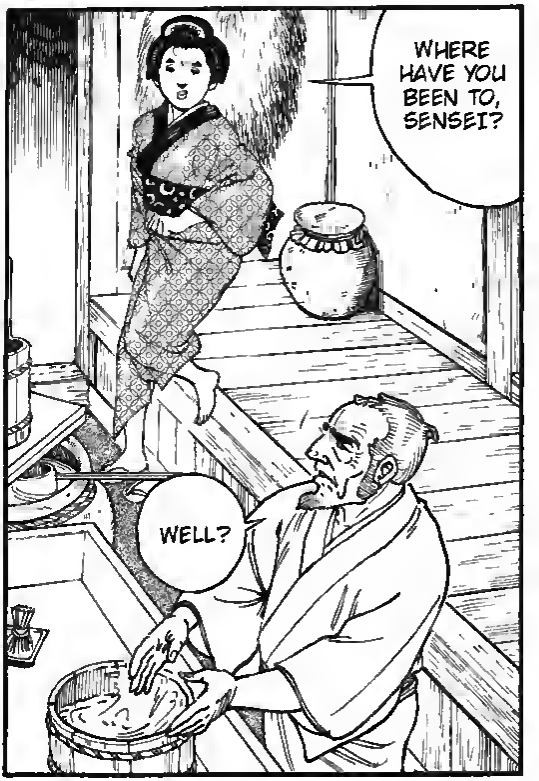
WE'VE
CLEARED
THEM

POOR
BASTARDS
!


WHEN OHARU
RETURNED FROM
THE ERRAND
TRIP A COUPLE
OF HOURS
LATER THERE
WAS NO SIGN
OF KOHEI, OR
MIFUYU OR ANY
HUMAN CORPSES
AROUND THE
HOUSE.

KOHEI CAME HOME AFTER DARK.


I WAS BUSY BURYING SOME CORPSES LYING ON THE ROAD SIDE.
AAH, A SOCIAL WORK.


WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN TO, SENSEI?
WELL?

GEE WHIZZ!
...A WHITE LIE.
THAT'S A LIE...

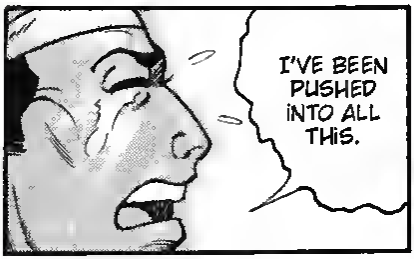
YES, THAT'S A LIE, WHITE AND BIG AS WELL.
YOU ARE RIGHT OHARU!
WAH, HA HA HA!
HA HA, HO HO!

THE FENCING MATCH BETWEEN MIFUYU SASAKI AND UKYO NAGAI TOOK PLACE IN JANUARY 1778 IN THE FRONT YARD OF OKITSUGU TANUMA'S DOWN TOWN RESIDENCE.

OW!
YEE, ACH!
COME!
FIGHT LIKE A MAN!
WOO---!

HEECH!
OH!
WHAT A SHAME!
GWAA!

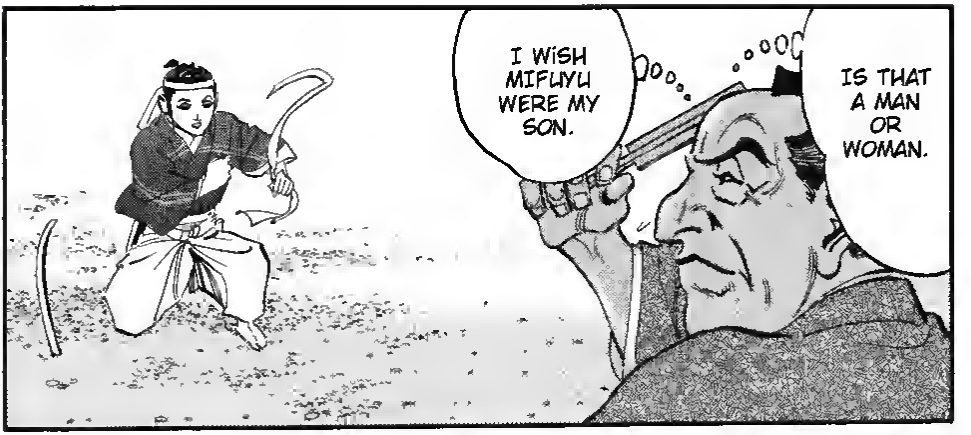
THE ARM IS BROKEN, MY RIGHT ARM!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?


I'VE BEEN PUSHED INTO ALL THIS.

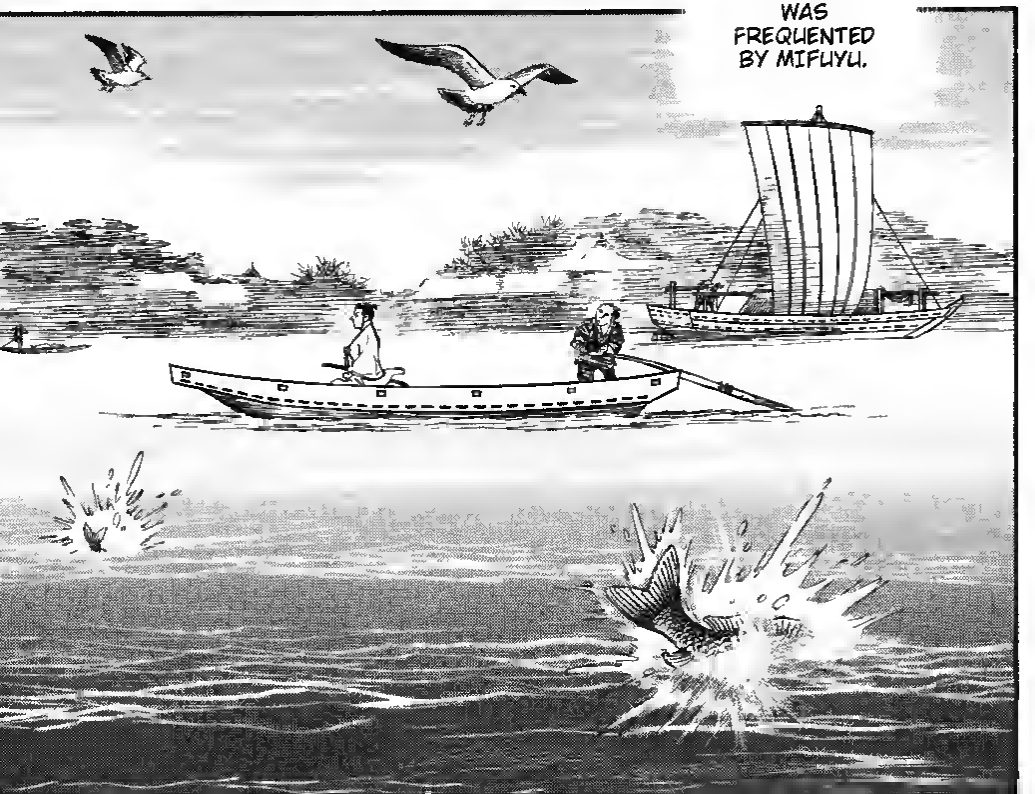
HOLD THERE!
HYAAA!

YOU ARE NOT MY SON ANY MORE.
YOU HAVE SMEARED THE FAMILY NAME.
THAT'S TOO MUCH, FATHER.

I REFUSE TO MARRY SUCH A CREATURE!
MY DECISION IS ROCK SOLID.

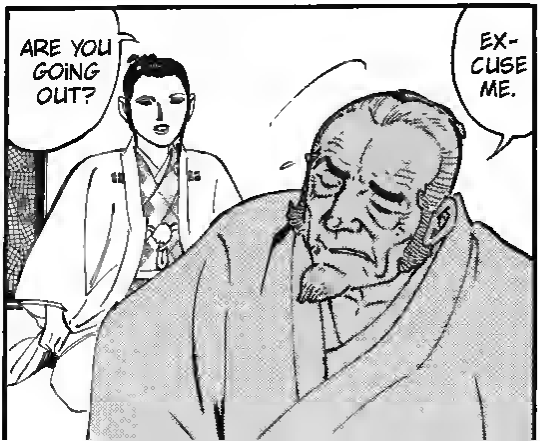


SINCE THE FENCING MATCH, KOHEI'S RESIDENCE WAS FREQUENTED BY MIFUYU.



HICKS!

AAH, SORT OF.


ARE YOU GOING OUT?
EX-CUSE ME.

SUCH A SEXY GLANCE.
IT IS GETTING HARDER FOR ME TO RESIST IT.
I SENSE A SEXY FEMININE BODY BEHIND A MASCULINE ATTIRE.
IS THAT WOMAN STILL HANGING AROUND?
BE QUIET, OHARU.
THAT BITCH GETS ON MY NERVES!
PLEASE KICK HER OUT OF HERE, RIGHT AWAY, SENSEI.

STOP CRYING OHARU.
INCIDENTALLY, WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE DOJO RUN BY DAIJIRO, KOHEI'S SON?

NOTHING IS HAPPENING.
IT'S A SCARY SCENE.
HE DOES NOT EAT NOR SLEEP.
FOR THREE DAYS NOW.
HE JUST SITS THERE, IMMOBILE LIKE A BUDDHA-STATUE.

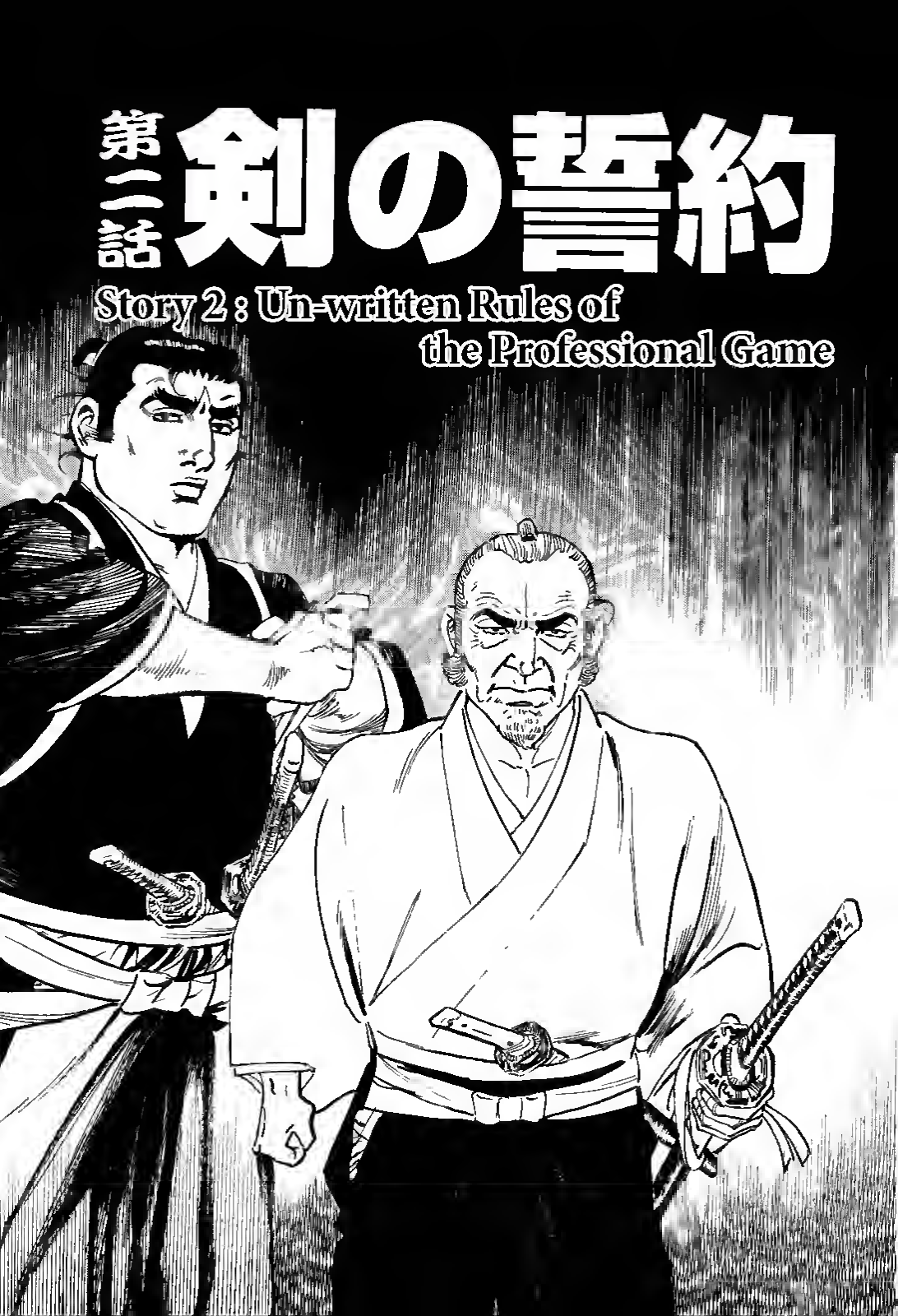
YEEEH!!

THE SCARED VILLAGERS FLED, WHISPERING EACH OTHER THAT THE GREAT KOHEI MUST HAVE CAST AN INSTRUCTIVE SPELL OVER HIS HELPLESS SON.

Story 1 End

第二話 剣の誓約

Story 2 : Un-written Rules of the Professional Game



AS IF MERCIFUL BUDDHA WILLED IT, A YOUTH OF A HATAMOTO FAMILY KNOCKED ON THE DOOR OF DAIJIRO AKIYAMA'S DOJO IN ASAKUSA, ONE MORNING.

THE GUY'S NAME WAS YUJIRO TAKAO. THE ROBUST GUY IN HIS TWENTIES SOUGHT DAIJIRO'S GUIDANCE AFTER PAYING THE INITIATION FEE OF FIFTY RYO.
THE FIRST ASSIGNMENT GIVEN TO THIS YOUNG HATAMOTO GUY WAS TO MASTER 2000 DAILY SWINGS OF A WOODEN TRAINING SWORD WEIGHING 15KGS AND CLAD WITH AN IRON RING.
THE GUY DID FIFTY SWINGS ON DAY ONE, AND 80 SWINGS ON DAY TWO BEFORE COLLAPSING.
ON DAY THREE, THE GUY COLLAPSED ON THE FLOOR AFTER SOME 100 SWING, AND FAINTED.
THAT'S NOT TRAINING. THE MASTER MUST BE CRAZY. HE IS GOING TO KILL ME.

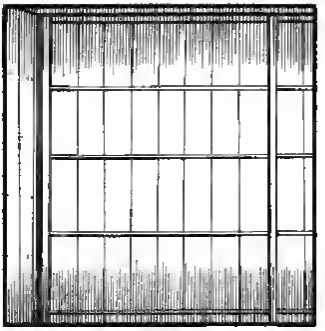
BUT LASTED ONLY THREE DAYS. AND LEFT, WITHOUT COLLECTING THE INITIATION MONEY, WHICH IS GOOD.
THE GUY DID NOT LOOK THAT WIMPY TO ME AT A GLANCE.

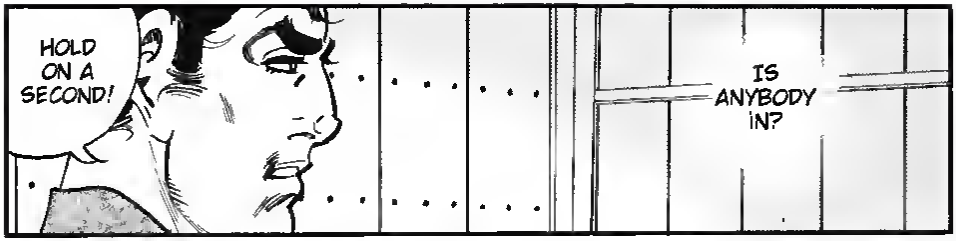
DELI-CIOUS!

HE DID NOT HAVE TO BE BOTHERED WITH COOKING CHORES ANY MORE.
NOW DAIJIRO WAS ABLE TO HIRE A PART TIME MAID TO HAVE SOME DECENT MEAL PREPAIRED AND SERVED ON A TRAY.

THE ONLY THING I COULD AFFORD TO PUT IN THE MISO SOUP WAS GREEN ONION FOR ALMOST SIX MONTHS.
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT MUD SNAILS TASTE THIS GOOD.

A POST-MEAL NAP IS AN INDISPENSABLE HABIT FOR ANY ONE DESIROUS OF BECOMING A MASTER SWORDSMAN.
AN HOUR'S NAP HAS BEEN REGIMENTED INTO HIS DAILY ROUTINE BY HIS FATHER.




HOLD ON A SECOND!
IS ANYBODY IN?

..SHIMA-OKA SENSEI!
WHAT A SUR-PRISE...

LONG TIME NO SEE, DAI-JIRO.

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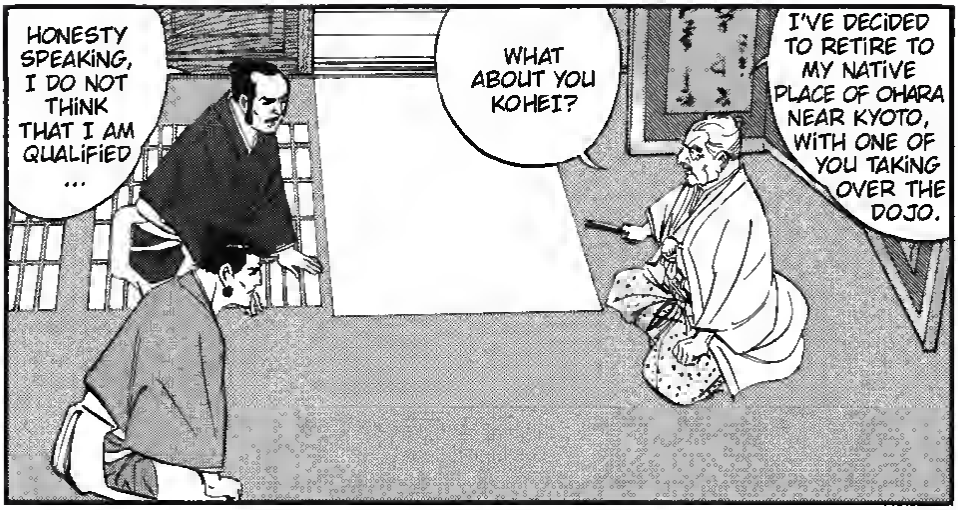
WHAT A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU AGAIN SHIMAOKA SENSEI.

A SENIOR SWORDSMEN ARE CALLED SENSEI (MEANING TEACHER) IN THE WORLD OF PROFESSIONAL MARTIAL ARTS. SHIMAOKA SENSEI'S FIRST NAME IS REIZO. HE IS 57 YEARS OLD, THREE YEARS JUNIOR TO DAIJIRO'S FATHER KOHEI.

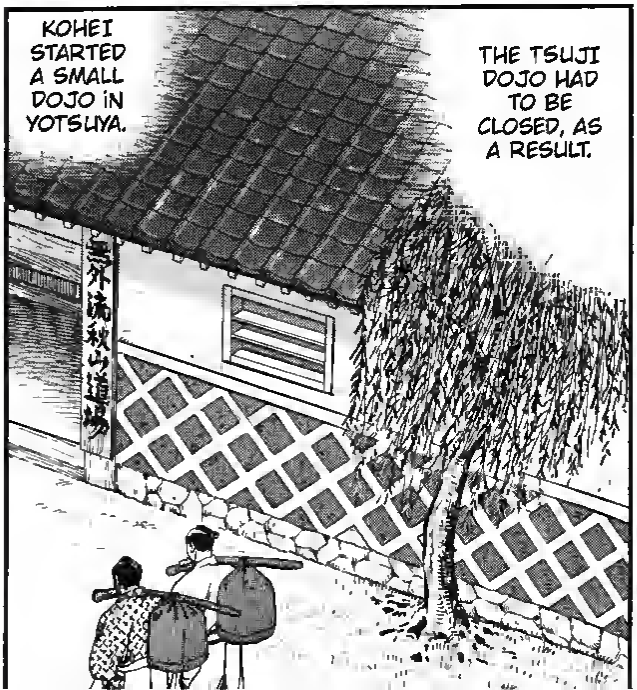
I'VE GOT A SERIOUS REQUEST TO MAKE OF YOU, AS A MATTER OF FACT.
EXCUSE MY ABRUPT VISIT.

AS HEIEMON WAS AGING, THE NUMBER OF ACTIVE TRAINEES HAS GRADUALLY DWINDLED DOWN FROM 200 TO A MERE SEVEN INCLUDING REIZO HOLDING THE FORT AS MASTER TRAINER.
DECADES AGO, BOTH REIZO AND DAIJIRO'S FATHER KOHEI WERE PEER TRAINEES AT A DOJO THEN MANAGED PROSPEROUSLY BY HEIEMON TSUJI AT KOJIMACHI.
RE-QUEST, SEN-SEI?
TRAINEES QUIT SAYING THE DOJO'S TRAINING DISCIPLINE IS TOO TOUGH ON THEM.
KOHEI AND REIZO WERE SUMMONED TO SHARE THEIR INTENT.
SHORTLY BEFORE THE DEMISE, EMON CONFIDED WITH KOHEI AND REIZO THAT HE WOULD RETIRE LEAVING THE MANAGEMENT OF THE DOJO TO EITHER ONE OF THE TWO ELITE TRAINEES.


HONESTY SPEAKING, I DO NOT THINK THAT I AM QUALIFIED ...
WHAT ABOUT YOU KOHEI?
I'VE DECIDED TO RETIRE TO MY NATIVE PLACE OF OHARA NEAR KYOTO, WITH ONE OF YOU TAKING OVER THE DOJO.

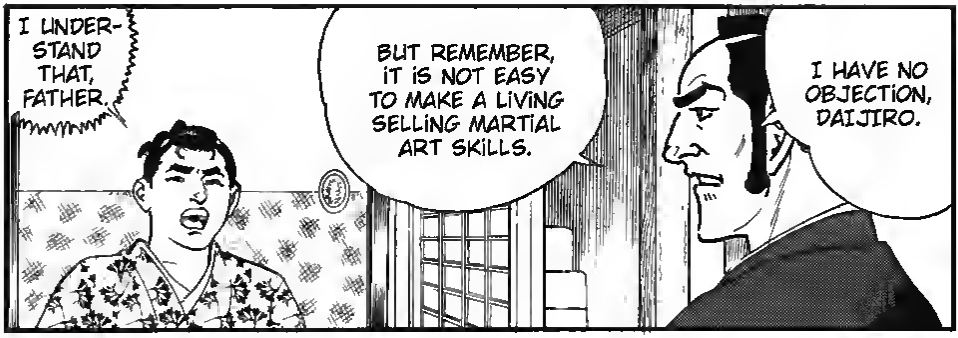
WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY, REIZO?

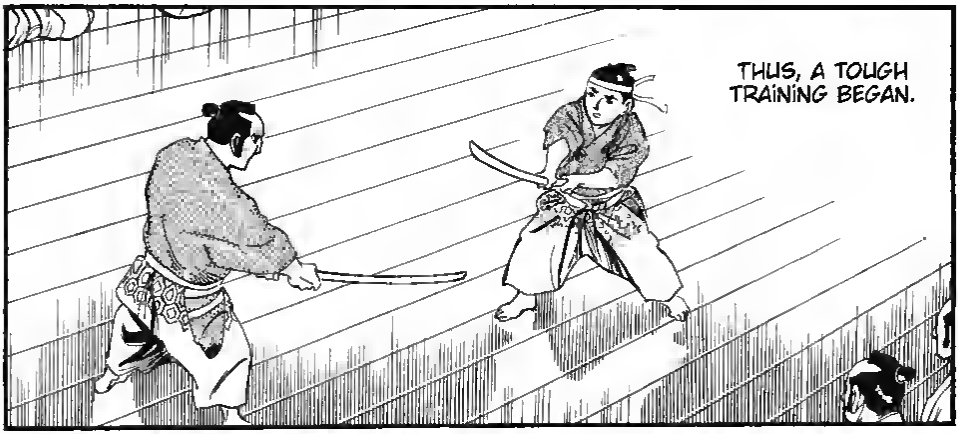
...WHICH LASTED FOR THREE GENERA-TIONS.
...TO CARRY OVER THE HONORABLE NAME OF THE TSUJI FAMILY...


KOHEI STARTED A SMALL DOJO IN YOTSUYA.
THE TSUJI DOJO HAD TO BE CLOSED, AS A RESULT.

FIRST LET ME ESCORT YOU TO OHARA AND SPEND A FEW MONTHS THERE WITH YOU BEFORE I MAKE UP MY MIND.

...FREE FROM PETTY CHORES RELATED TO THE DOJO MANAGE-MENT.
I WANT TO CONCENTRATE ON THE TRAINING TO ENHANCE MY FENCING SKILLS...
A BIG OPERA-TION...
...IS NOT MY STYLE.
I'M THIRTEEN NOW, FATHER. I'VE DECIDED TO FOLLOW YOUR STEPS AS SWORDS-MAN.
THE WIFE DIED WHEN DAIJIRO WAS SEVEN.
KOHEI MARRIED AND BEGOT A SON, DAIJIRO.


I UNDER-STAND THAT, FATHER.
BUT REMEMBER, IT IS NOT EASY TO MAKE A LIVING SELLING MARTIAL ART SKILLS.
I HAVE NO OBJECTION, DAIJIRO.


THUS, A TOUGH TRAINING BEGAN.

YOU NEED AN OBJECTIVE TRAINING TO MAKE A GRADE AS SWORDSMAN.
MY FELLOW MASTER REIZO HAS AGREED TO TRAIN YOU IN HIS ABODE OF OHARA.

!!!
?

AT THE AGE OF FIFTEEN DAIJIRO MOVED TO OHARA TO START TRAINING AT THE NEW TSUJI DOJO.
I WILL NOT SEE MY FATHER AGAIN UNTIL I WILL HAVE MASTERED THE REAL SWORDSMANSHIP.
DAIJIRO POLISHED HIS FENCING SKILLS FOR FIVE YEARS UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF REIZO, ACTING HEAD OF THE DOJO.
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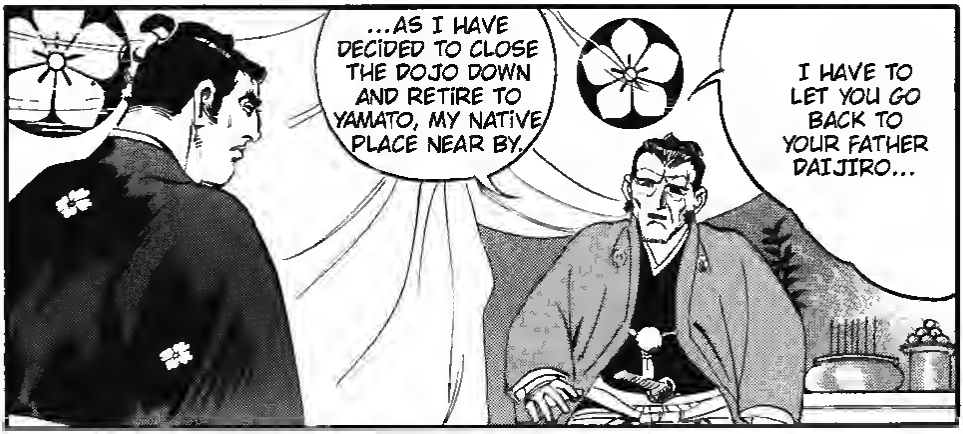
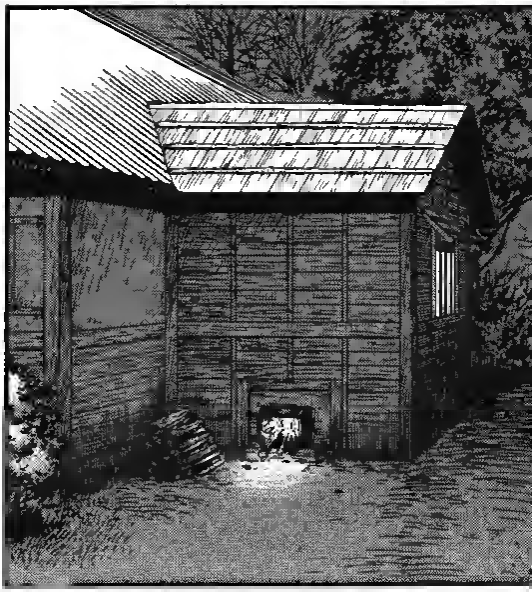
WHEN HEIEMON TSUJI, FORMAL OWNER OF THE DOJO DIED, DAIJIRO SERVED AS ONE OF THE PALLBEARERS.

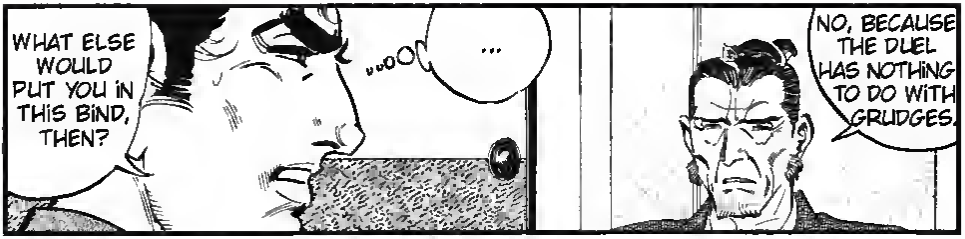

...AS I HAVE DECIDED TO CLOSE THE DOJO DOWN AND RETIRE TO YAMATO, MY NATIVE PLACE NEAR BY.
I HAVE TO LET YOU GO BACK TO YOUR FATHER DAIJIRO...



HE WOULD BE ELATED TO COME HERE TO SEE YOU FROM ACROSS THE RIVER.

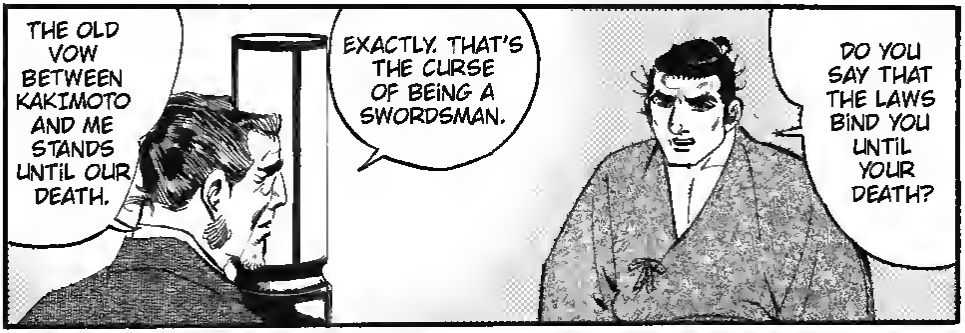
HE IS, THANK YOU.
I HOPE YOUR FATHER IS DOING FINE.

WHY IS THAT?
!
NO WAY!
LET ME RUN A COURIER TO INFORM HIM OF YOUR ARRIVAL.
A DEATH MATCH?
I DO NOT WANT MY OLD COMRADE TO BE THE WITNESS OF THE IMMINENT DEATH SWORDS MATCH.
...WHY DO YOU HAVE TO RISK YOUR LIFE AT YOUR AGE?
PLEASE TELL ME THEN...
CANNOT YOU JUST WASH OFF THAT OLD GRUDGE?
THERE ARE DECADES LONG COMPLICATIONS BEHIND THE DUEL.


WHAT ELSE WOULD PUT YOU IN THIS BIND, THEN?
...
NO, BECAUSE THE DUEL HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH GRUDGES.

BUT YOU ARE NOT AN ACTIVE SWORDSMAN ANY MORE.

...BASED ON UNWRITTEN LAWS BINDING PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMEN. MY OPPONENT'S NAME IS GENSHICHIRO KAKIMOTO.
THE DUEL IS TO TAKE PLACE ...


THE OLD VOW BETWEEN KAKIMOTO AND ME STANDS UNTIL OUR DEATH.
EXACTLY. THAT'S THE CURSE OF BEING A SWORDSMAN.
DO YOU SAY THAT THE LAWS BIND YOU UNTIL YOUR DEATH?

KAKIMOTO, THEN, WAS ONE OF THE LEADING SWORDSMEN BELONGING TO A DOJO LOCATED IN ICHIGAYA.
THE INITIAL MATCH BETWEEN US TWO TOOK PLACE SOME TWENTY YEARS AGO AT THE TSUJI DOJO IN EDO.

WHAT VOW, MAY I ASK?

IT'S A LONG STORY.

I'M HERE TO REQUEST A MATCH WITH THE BOSSMAN OF YOUR DOJO.
HE IS ENGAGED AT THE MOMENT.
YOUR WISH WILL NOT BE GRANTED UNTIL YOU BEAT ME FIRST.
AT THAT TIME, TSUJI SENSEI WAS ENGAGED IN READING...
...AND YOUR FATHER HAPPENED TO BE AWAY ON A TRAINING TOUR.
SHIT!
KAKIMOTO'S HAIRY SIX-FOOT STATUE WAS FULL OF AGGRESSIVE ENERGY.
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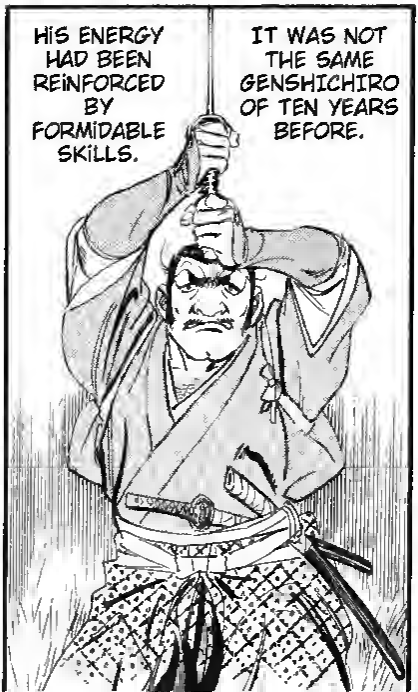
OOOPF!
WOO!
THANK YOU FOR THE LESSON.
GIVE ME SOME TIME TO BRUSH UP MY IMMATURE SKILL.

IF KAKIMOTO HAD BEATEN ME THEN, HE MAY HAVE TAKEN OVER THE OHTA DOJO TO BE ENTHRONED AS MAGNATE SWORDSMAN.
ALLOW ME TO CHALLENGE YOU AGAIN IN TEN YEARS TIME IN A MATCH USING A GENUINE SWORD.
YOUR CHALLENGE HAS BEEN ACCEPTED.
...
...
...PRESUMABLY JUST TO POLISH UP FENCING SKILLS IN PREPARATION FOR THE REVENGE DUEL.
GENSHICHIRO GOT LOST FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS...
HOW DID THE SECOND ROUND, GO THEN?
THE PLOT THICKENS.
VINDIC-TIVENESS, YOU MAY CALL IT.

...IN A TINY OPENING IN A DEEP FOREST NEAR MT.TSUKUBA.
IT TOOK PLACE TEN YEARS LATER...

SO, I WOULD NOT BUDGE AN INCH.

BUT IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH.
AN AMAZING IMPROVE-MENT!


HIS ENERGY HAD BEEN REINFORCED BY FORMIDABLE SKILLS.
IT WAS NOT THE SAME GENSHICHIRO OF TEN YEARS BEFORE.

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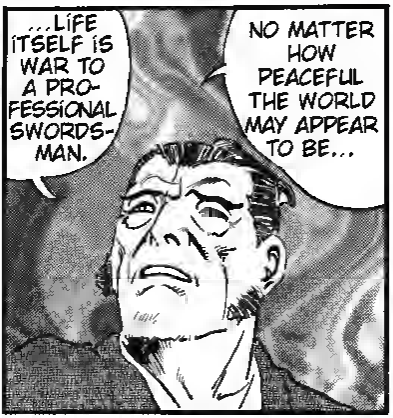
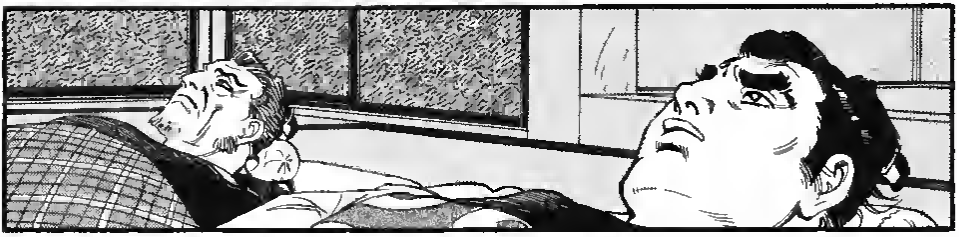
THE TWO SILHOUETTES CAME TO STAND STILL A FEW METERS APART AND REMAINED IMMOBILE FOR WELL OVER AN HOUR.

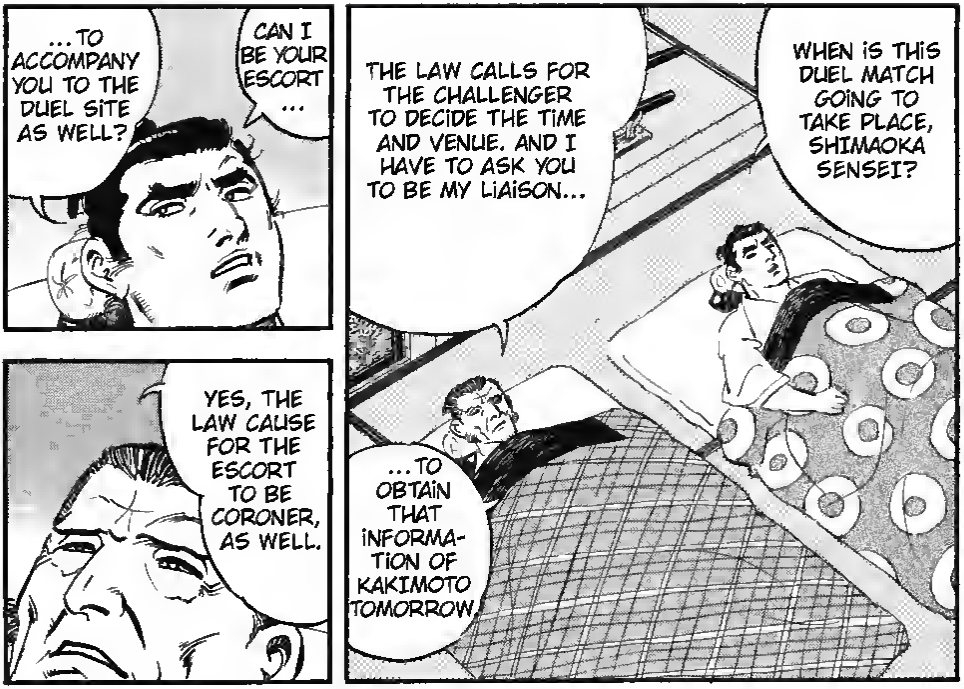
IT'S SUFFO-CATING!
NEITHER OF US HAD ENERGY LEFT TO MAINTAIN THE FIGHTING POSTURE ANY MORE.
SO...
IT'S GETTING UNBEAR-ABLE.
TWO RIVAL SWORDS-MEN...
ARE DESTINED TO KEEP ON DUELING UNTIL ONE BEATS THE OTHER.
...
...FOR THE FINAL DUAL.
LET'S WAIT FOR TEN MORE YEARS ...
#...
AGREED!

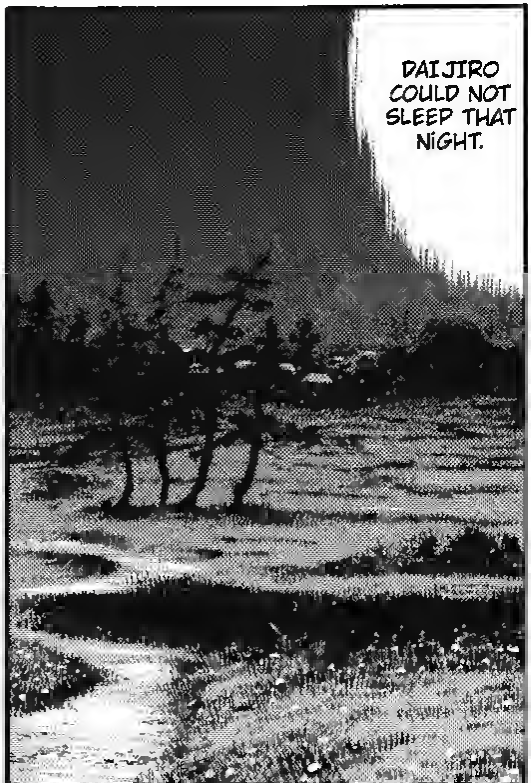
YES, SHIMAOKA SENSEI.
REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOW A PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMAN YOURSELF.
IT'S A CURSE YOU CANNOT SHAKE OFF UNTIL YOU DIE.


...LIFE ITSELF IS WAR TO A PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMAN.
NO MATTER HOW PEACEFUL THE WORLD MAY APPEAR TO BE...

...

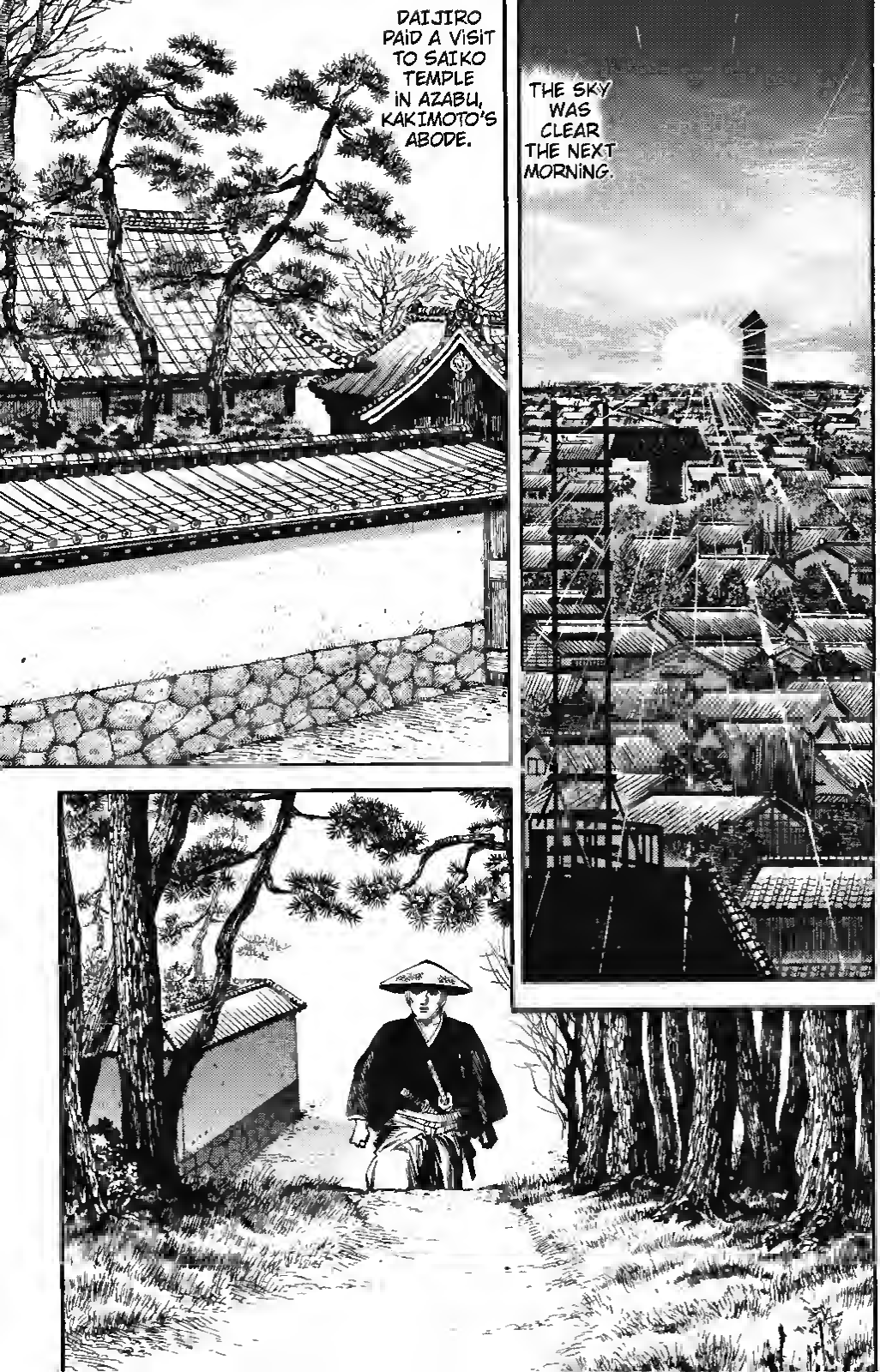


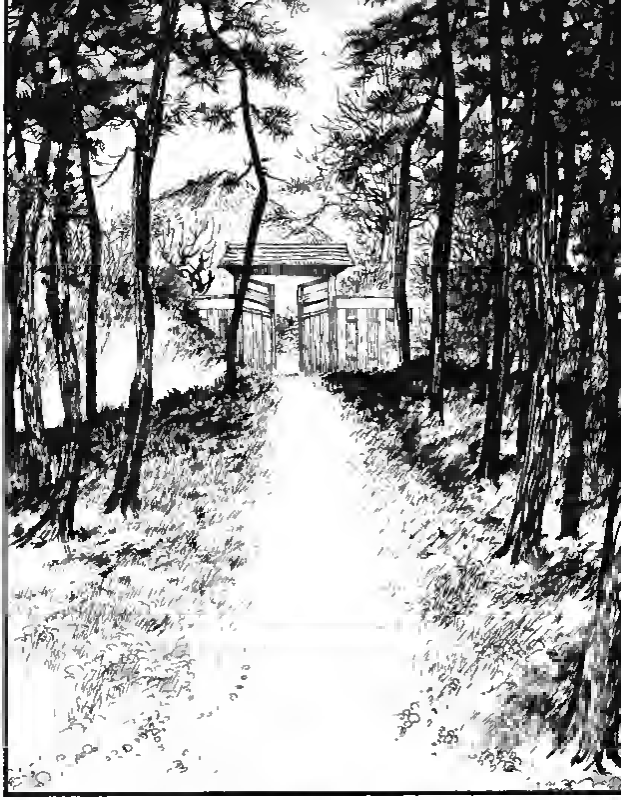

CAN I BE YOUR ESCORT ...
...TO ACCOMPANY YOU TO THE DUEL SITE AS WELL?
WHEN IS THIS DUEL MATCH GOING TO TAKE PLACE, SHIMAOKA SENSEI?
THE LAW CALLS FOR THE CHALLENGER TO DECIDE THE TIME AND VENUE. AND I HAVE TO ASK YOU TO BE MY LIAISON...
...TO OBTAIN THAT INFORMATION OF KAKIMOTO TOMORROW.
YES, THE LAW CAUSE FOR THE ESCORT TO BE CORONER, AS WELL.


DAIJIRO COULD NOT SLEEP THAT NIGHT.

I'M HONORED TO HAVE MY OLD COMRADE'S SON ACCEPTING THE ROLE.
IT'S ME WHO AM HONORED.

...


DAIJIRO PAID A VISIT TO SAIKO TEMPLE IN AZABU, KAKIMOTO'S ABODE.
THE SKY WAS CLEAR THE NEXT MORNING.



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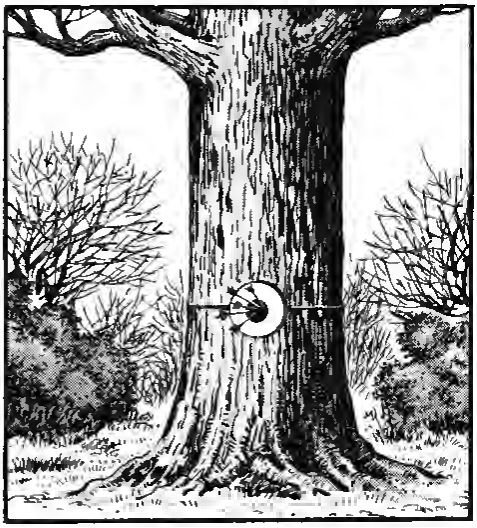
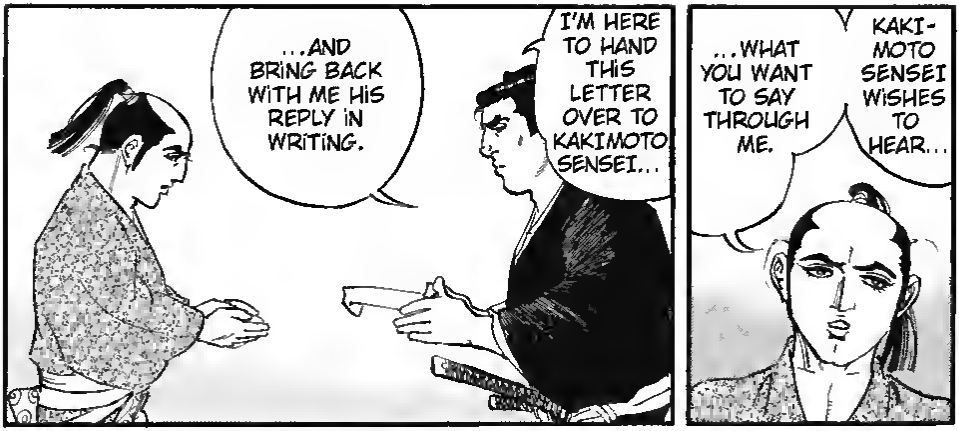
…!!

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
...
I AM HERE TO DELIVER REIZO SHIMAOKA'S LETTER TO KAKIMOTO SENSEI.
MY NAME IS DAIJIRO AKIYAMA. I'M A LIAISON DISPATCHED BY SWORDSMAN REIZO SHIMAOKA.
...TO WAIT THERE FOR A WHILE.
I BEG YOU...
IS KAKIMOTO SENSEI HOME?



IS HE JUST A TRAINEE CO-HABITING WITH KAKI-MOTO?
THAT'S A TOP-NOTCH ARCHERY SKILL.

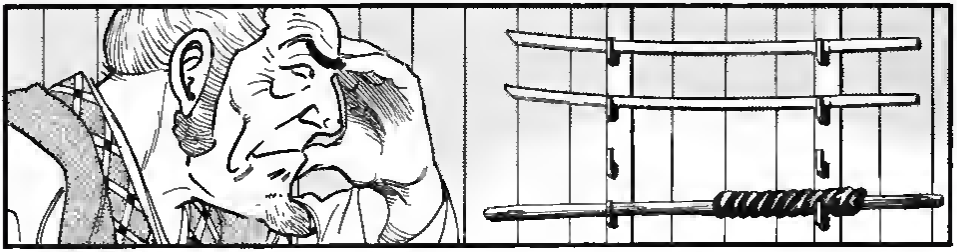

...AND BRING BACK WITH ME HIS REPLY IN WRITING.
I'M HERE TO HAND THIS LETTER OVER TO KAKIMOTO SENSEI...
...WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY THROUGH ME.
KAKI-MOTO SENSEI WISHES TO HEAR...

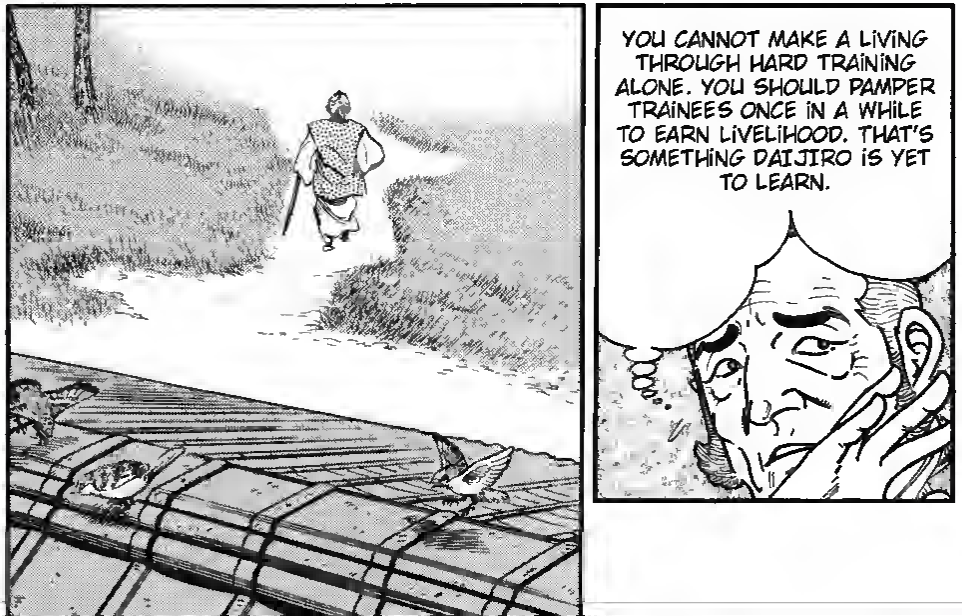
IT'S STRANGE THAT THEY WOULDN'T LET ME SEE KAKIMOTO IN PERSON.

...KOHEI AKIYAMA VISITED DAIJIRO'S DOJO.

WHILE DAIJIRO WAS OUT TO THE LIAISON MISSION...

DAIJIRO REPORTS THAT HE HAS SOME FRESH TRAINEES.
I CAME HERE TO SEE HOW HE IS GETTING ALONG WITH HIS TRAINEES.
BUT NOT A SOUL HERE AT THE DOJO!



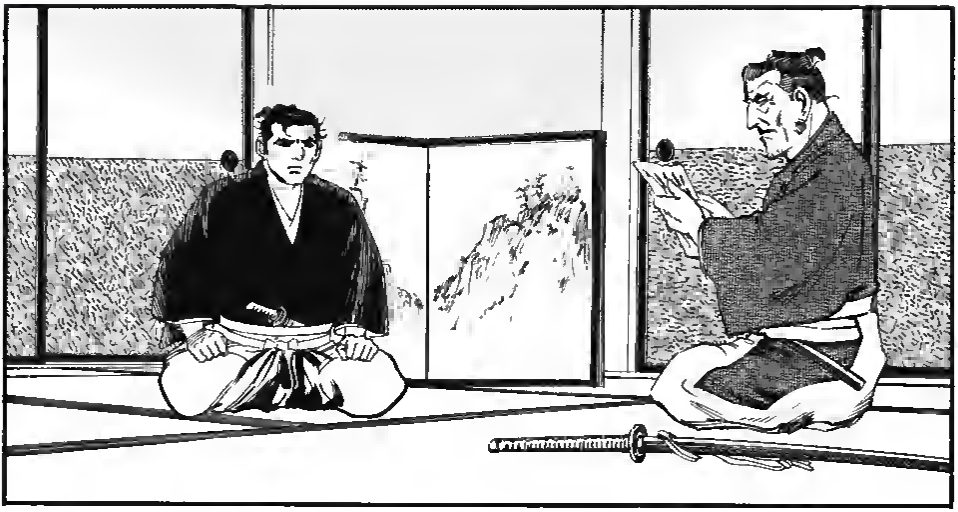

YOU CANNOT MAKE A LIVING THROUGH HARD TRAINING ALONE. YOU SHOULD PAMPER TRAINEES ONCE IN A WHILE TO EARN LIVELIHOOD. THAT'S SOMETHING DAIJIRO IS YET TO LEARN.

...
TAKE THIS ESTEEMED REPLY FROM THE HONORABLE KAKIMOTO SENSEI.
YOUR SUPERIOR AS WELL AS HIS DOCUMENTS SHOULD BE HUMBLED BEFORE A STRANGER.
THAT GUY DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO USE THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROPERLY.
FARE-WELL.
嶋岡礼蔵殿
THANK YOU.

I KILLED HIM!
!
WHAT IS THAT LETTER ABOUT, SENSEI.
NOTHING SERIOUS!

OOO-- HUUM.
LIBIDO SHOULD BE RESTRAINED DURING THE DAYTIME.
STOP FONDING MY THING, SENSEI
IT'S JUST A LETTER FROM MY OLD FRIEND.
...EASY SENSEI!
LIE DOWN...
OOO---!
MUFF!
LET ME GIVE YOU THE MEDICINE.
ARE YOU OK NOW?

Z.Z.Z...
THAT SHALL NOT HAPPEN!
A DUEL WITH MY AILING SENSEI!
WHAT A HECK!
I SEE.
...A REPLY FROM GEN-JIRO KAKI-MOTO.
SHIMAOKA SENSEI, I'VE BROUGHT BACK..
嶋岡礼蔵殿

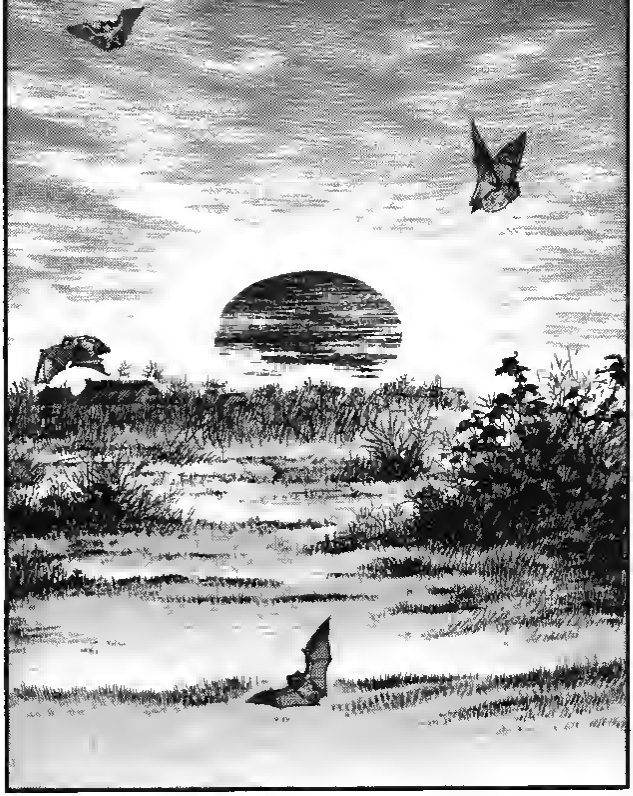


THE TIME AND THE PLACE?
HE CALLS FOR A DUEL TO TAKE PLACE ON THE 10TH, THREE DAYS FROM NOW.

SIX O'CLOCK IN FRONT OF THE KOHRIN TEMPLE OF AZABU.

WHY IS THAT, MAY I ASK?

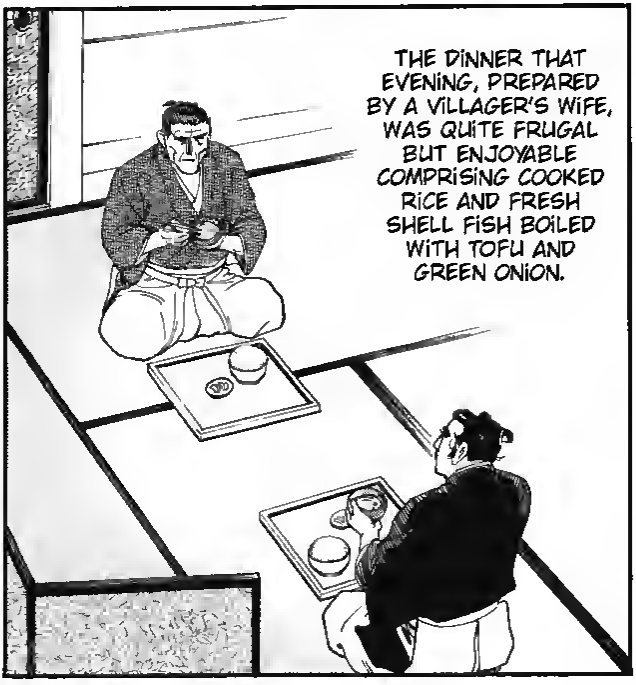
HIS PENMANSHIP WAS FLAWLESS WHEN HE WROTE TO ME IN YAMATO.
KAKIMOTO'S WRITING STYLE APPEARS TO HAVE DETERIORATED IN A YEAR.



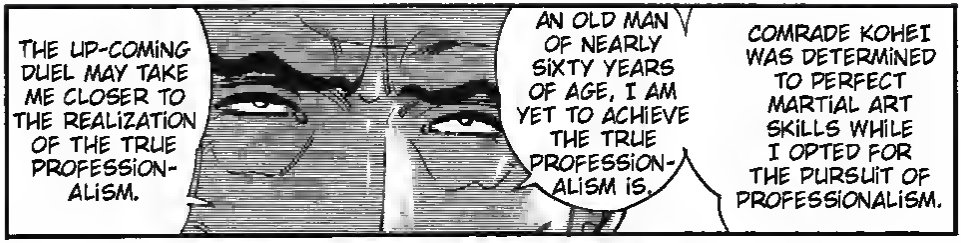
AGING SHOULD NOT BE THE CAUSE.
MAYBE, I JUST FEELS THAT WAY.

...

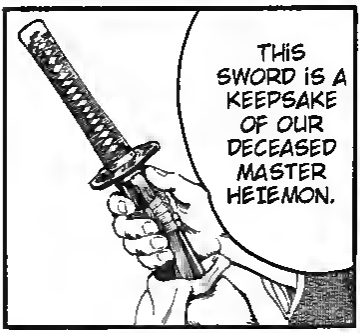
THIS IS THE EDO CUISINE I USED TO ENJOY IN MY YOUTH.
GOOD OLD DAYS!

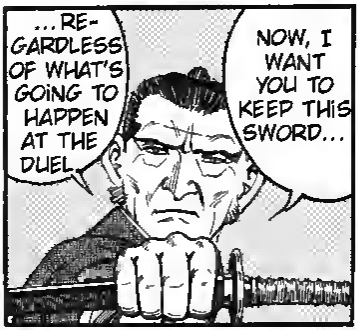

THE DINNER THAT EVENING, PREPARED BY A VILLAGER'S WIFE, WAS QUITE FRUGAL BUT ENJOYABLE COMPRISING COOKED RICE AND FRESH SHELL FISH BOILED WITH TOFU AND GREEN ONION.

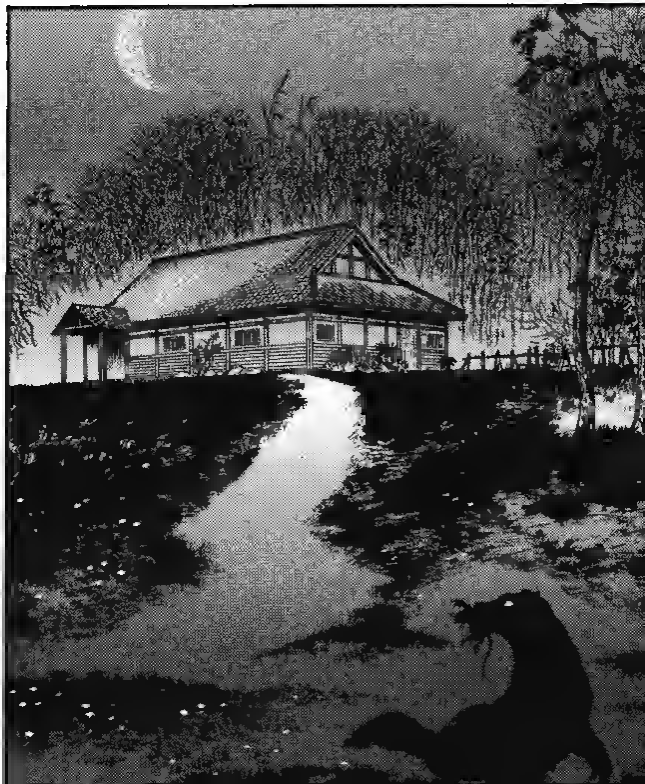
UU--M!
DON'T YOU WANT TO SEE MY FATHER?
SENSEI!
...MAYBE THIRTY YEARS.
IT'S BEEN QUITE SOME TIME...
MY FATHER WOULD BE ELATED.
TIME TO APPRECIATE THEM IS PRECIOUS, THOUGH.
?
OH, THAT LONG!
YOUR FATHER AND ME SPLIT WAYS WHEN HEIEMON SENSEI RETIRED.
BUT BYGONES ARE BYGONES.
...
BUT WE MAINTAINED AN AMICABLE RAPPORT SINCE.


THE UP-COMING DUEL MAY TAKE ME CLOSER TO THE REALIZATION OF THE TRUE PROFESSION-ALISM.
AN OLD MAN OF NEARLY SIXTY YEARS OF AGE, I AM YET TO ACHIEVE THE TRUE PROFESSION-ALISM IS.
COMRADE KOHEI WAS DETERMINED TO PERFECT MARTIAL ART SKILLS WHILE I OPTED FOR THE PURSUIT OF PROFESSIONALISM.

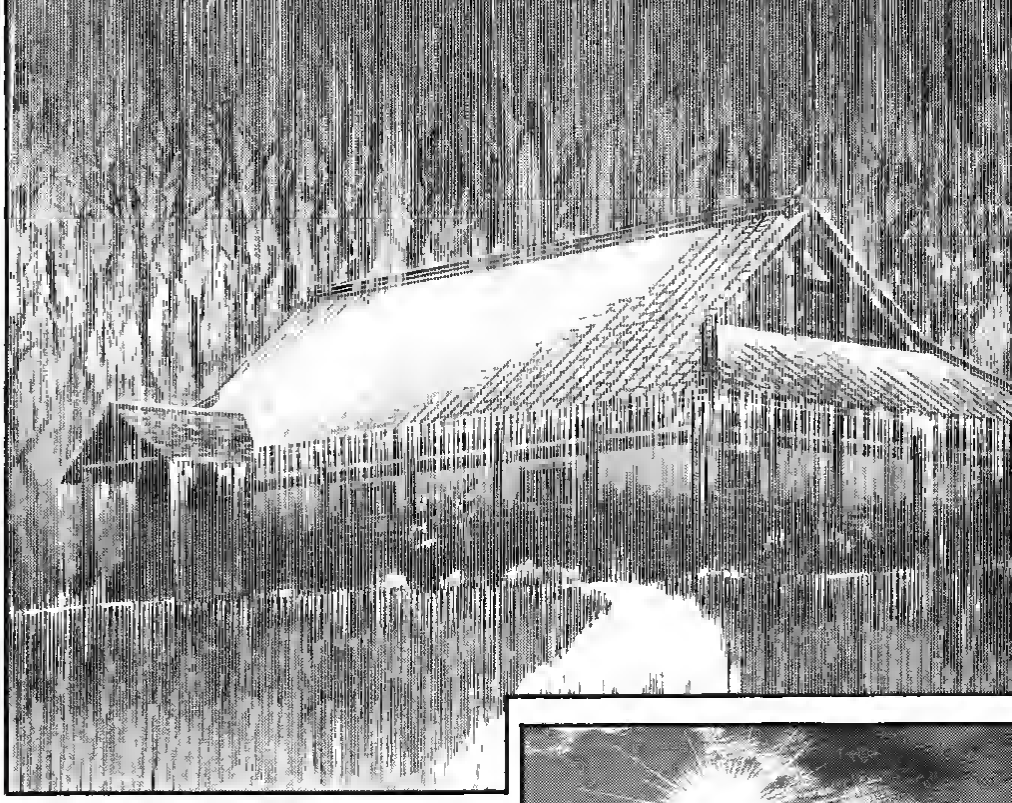
...
...TO HEAR SUCH AN EXCENTRIC PHILOSOPHY.
COMRADE KOHEI MAY LAUGH AT ME...


THIS SWORD IS A KEEPSAKE OF OUR DECEASED MASTER HEIEMON.


...RE-GARDLESS OF WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN AT THE DUEL.
NOW, I WANT YOU TO KEEP THIS SWORD...



I'M AWE-STRICKEN.
MY SOUL IS EMBEDDED IN THIS SWORD.
...
I HAVE NO REGRETS IN MY LIFE STYLE.
I KNOW THAT AGE IS CREEPING UP WITHIN ME.
IT STARTED TO RAIN OUT SIDE, DIDN'T IT.
I'LL CHERISH THE SWORD FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.
YOUR WORDS ARE MOST GRATIFYING.



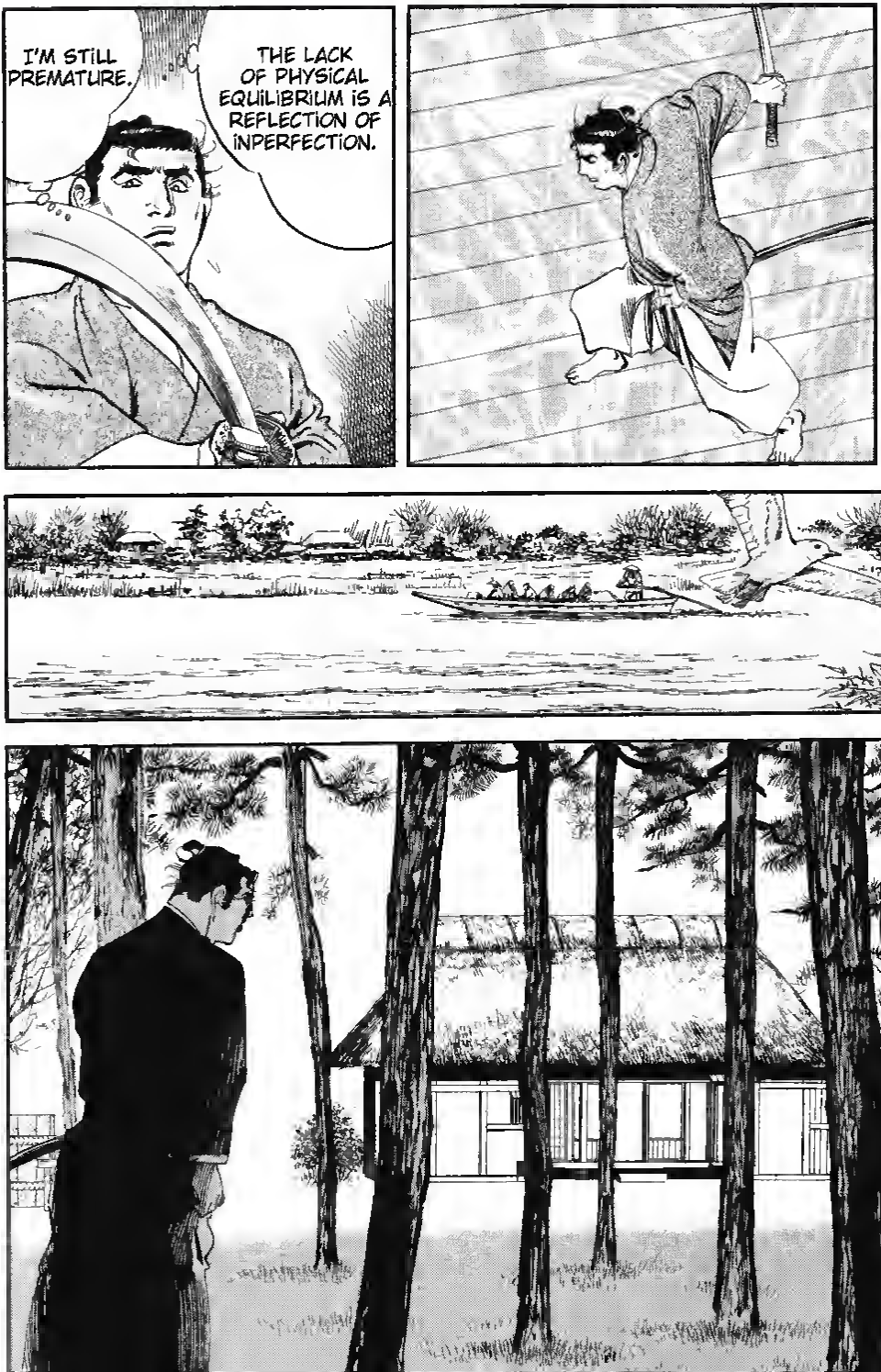
ALL RIGHT, PLEASE TAKE CARE.
無外流秋山道場
I'LL BE BACK BY THE DINNER TIME TODAY.

SHIMAOKA SENSEI IS RESOLVED TO COMPLETE A LIFE OF PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMAN IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

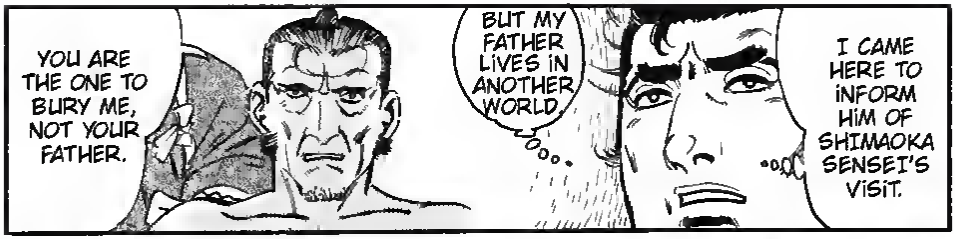
THEREFORE, I AM THE ONE WHO IS ENTITLED TO CALL FOR A REVENGE DUEL.
SHOULD KAKIMOTO WIN BY CHANCE, HIS NEXT OPPONENT IS GOING TO BE ME, DAIJIRO AKIYAMA.

LET'S WIPE OFF SUCH OMINOUS THOUGHTS.
NO SWORDSMAN SHOULD ALIENATE HIMSELF FROM THAT KIND OF OMINOUS FATALISM...
THAT'S MY FATE AS A PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMAN.
...AFTER DOING THIS BASIC TRAINING FOR ALMOST TWO DECADES?
HOW COME I'VE DIFFICULTY IN ACHIEVING THE EQUILIBRIUM THIS MORNING ...
AN EQUILIBRIUM SHOULD BE MAINTAINED BETWEEN BREATH TAKING AND LIMB MOVEMENTS CARRYING THE TORSO PARALLEL TO THE FLOOR.
IN THAT SENSE FLOOR CLEANING IS AN INDISPENSABLE PART OF THE TRAINING.
カ"!

MMM...
トヨ
TOOF!
ドゴ
YAP!
ドヒュ


I'M STILL PREMATURE.
THE LACK OF PHYSICAL EQUILIBRIUM IS A REFLECTION OF INPERFECTION.

THER GOES MY FATHER.
DIS-GUST-ING!


I CAME HERE TO INFORM HIM OF SHIMAOKA SENSEI'S VISIT.
BUT MY FATHER LIVES IN ANOTHER WORLD...
YOU ARE THE ONE TO BURY ME, NOT YOUR FATHER.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

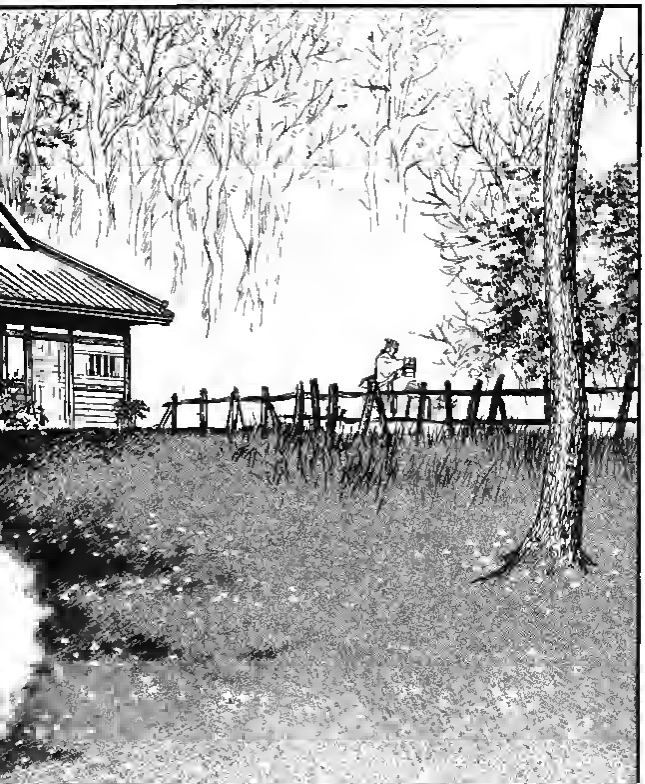
HIS WORDS ARE RINGING IN MY EARS.

I AM AT A LOSS...

DAIJIRO WANDERED AROUND FOR ABOUT AN HOUR WITHOUT KNOWING WHERE HE WAS...

A SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF A SHINTO SHRINE IN FRONT OF HIM SOBERED HIS MIND.
!

...AND A DECENT DINNER FOR SHIMAOKA SENSEI BEFORE HE COMES BACK.
STUPID ME! I'VE TO HURRY BACK TO PREPARE A HOT BATH...



OH, HE IS BACK ALREADY!
!

SHIMA-
OKA
SEN-
SEI!
!!
D--N!

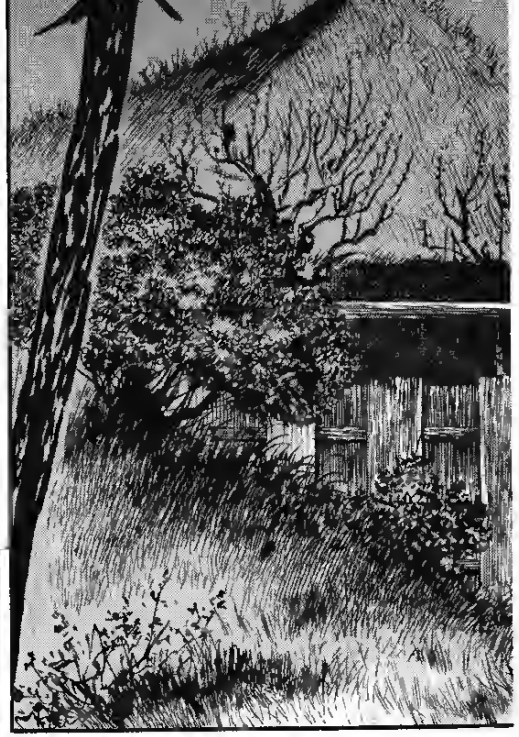
YOU S-O-B!

HELL!
YOU MUST BE THE BASTARD SERVING KAKI-MOTO!
GWAPH!
GYAA---!

SENSEI!
NWOH!

ズバッ
ガハッ
SENSEI!
SENSEEEI!
I'M DONE.
ズ…
SHIMAOKA SENSEI!
OH, NO!

WAS REIZO AM-BUSHED?
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
WHY ARE YOU HERE, REIZO?
THE LETHAL BLOW WAS AN ARROW SHOT RIGHT THROUGH THE HEART.
YOU'VE GOT TO TELL ME DAIJIRO.
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?



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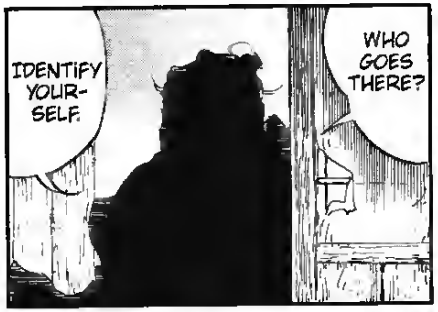

IDENTIFY YOURSELF.
WHO GOES THERE?

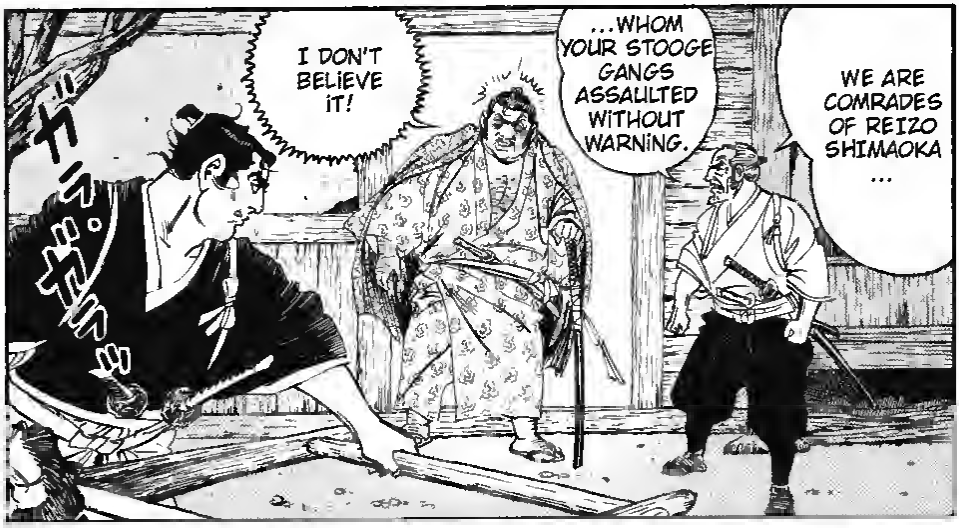
YOU SHOULD BE NO OTHER THAN GENSHIRO KAKIMOTO.

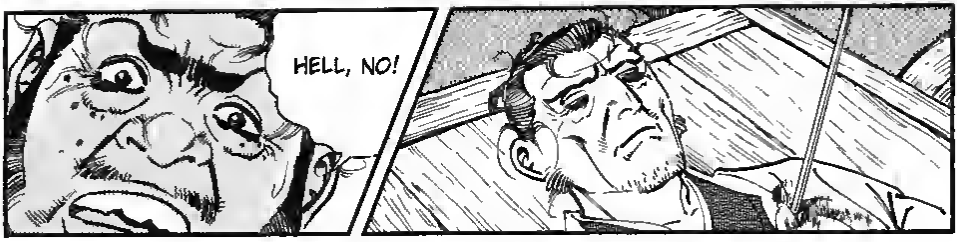
YES, FATHER.
YOU STICK WITH REIZO'S REMAINS WHILE I DO SOME RECONNAISSANCE AT KAKIMOTO'S ABODE.

!

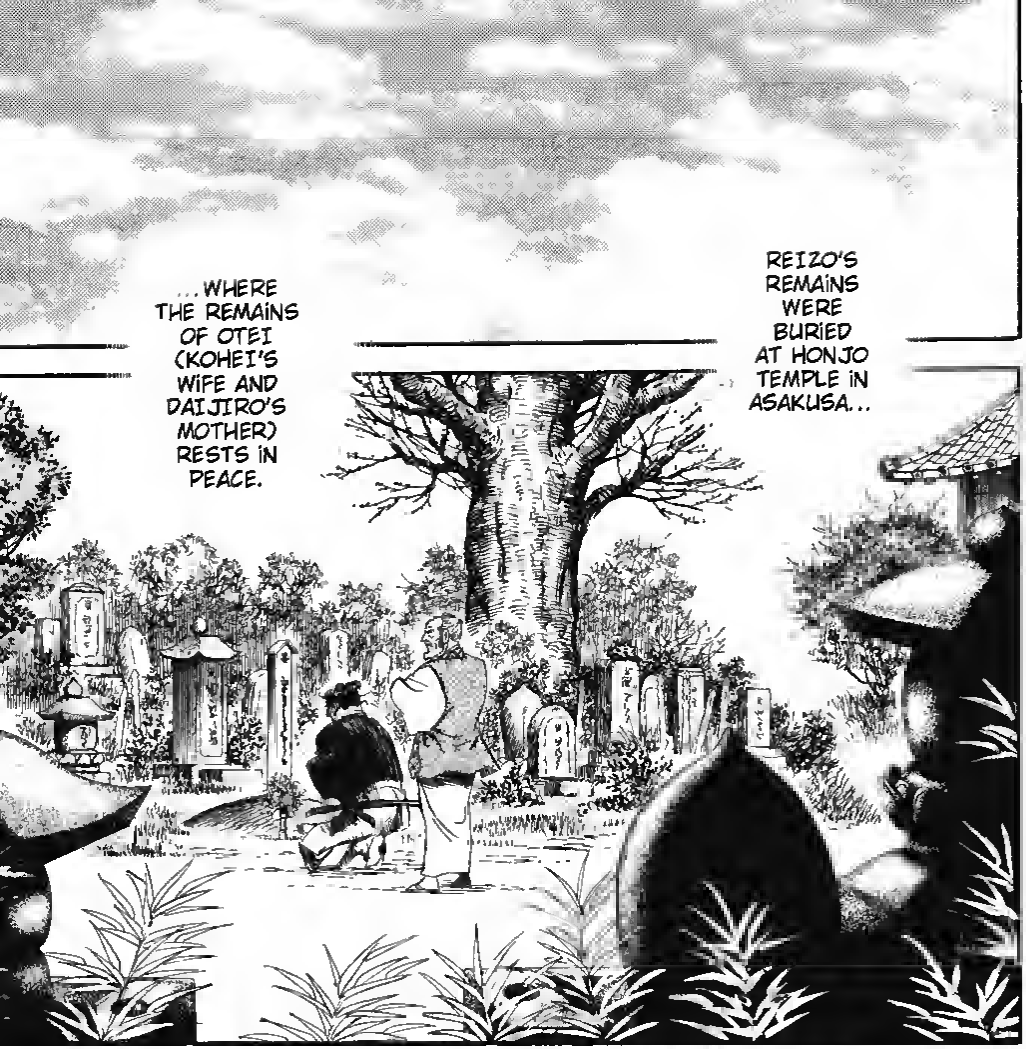
WHO ARE YOU?
THAT'S RIGHT.

IS THIS WRECK THAT KAKI-MOTO?
!!


I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
...WHOM YOUR STOOGE GANGS ASSAULTED WITHOUT WARNING.
WE ARE COMRADES OF REIZO SHIMAOKA ...


HELL, NO!

WHERE THE H--L IS HE NOW?
BUT I'M CERTAIN THAT THE SHOOTER WAS ONE OF MY MEN NAMED MITSUYA ITO.
I DIDN'T ORDER THE ATTACK.
DON'T YOU TELL ME THAT YOU ARE INNO-CENT!
I'M ASHAMED GENTLEMEN. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO PAY THE PRICE.
I SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW.
!!


...WHERE THE REMAINS OF OTEI (KOHEI'S WIFE AND DAIJIRO'S MOTHER) RESTS IN PEACE.
REIZO'S REMAINS WERE BURIED AT HONJO TEMPLE IN ASAKUSA...

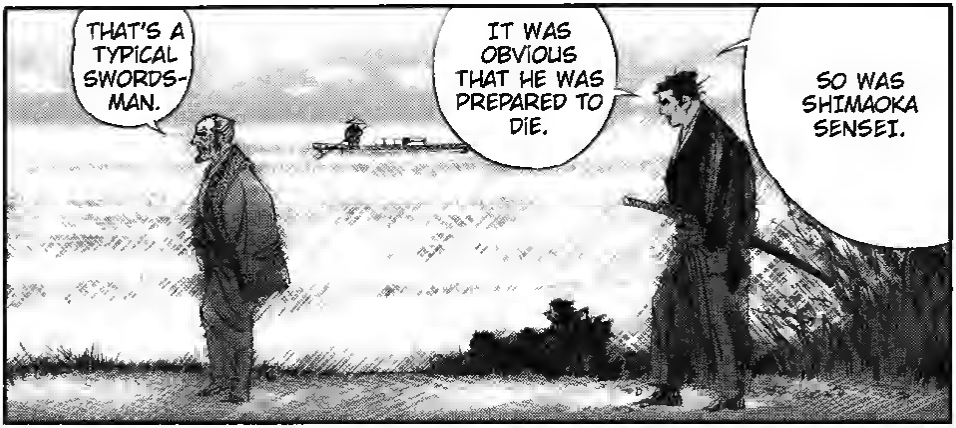
...
...MITSUYA ITO MUST HAVE BEEN A HOMO-SEXUAL PARTNER OF GENSHICHIRO KAKIMOTO.
JUDGING FROM WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED THUS FAR...

...
...HE SHOULD BE HATING YOUR GUTS.
NOW THAT MITSUYA ITO LOST NOT ONLY HIS RIGHT ARM BUT ALSO IS LOVER...
REIZO KNEW THAT OTEI'S REMAINS ...
HAD BEEN BURIED HERE AT HONJO TEMPLE.
I KNOW, FATHER.
THAT'S A CURSE PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMAN IS DESTINED TO CARRY.
HE SHOULD CERTAINLY COME TO YOU FOR A REVENGE SOME TIME.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
...TO PAY TRIBUTE TO HIS EX-SWEETHEARTS GRAVE WITH THIS BOUQUET OF FLOWERS WE SEE RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.
THE FIRST THING REIZO DID IN EDO THIS TRIP WAS...
OTEI PICKED ME OVER REIZO.
REIZO AND ME WERE RIVALS TRYING TO WIN THE HEART OF OTEI WHO WAS A HOUSE MADE SERVING OUR SENSEI, HEIEMON TSUJI.
WHY DIDN'T HE MARRY HER, THEN?

...
...TO REMAIN IN EDO BY MARRYING ME.
AND MADE UP HER MIND...
!!
...REIZO'S NATIVE PLACE?
HOW DO WE CONVEY THIS SAD NEWS TO YAMATO...
THAT WAS HOW THE TWO COMRADES TOOK SEPARATE WAYS.
REIZO LEFT EDO WITH OUR SENSEI, BROKEN-HEARTED.
...
...TO BRING THE NEWS TO MASTER REIZO'S FAMILY.
IF YOU PERMIT ME, FATHER. LET ME BE THE COURIER. I VOLUNTEER TO BE THE COURIER ...
THANK YOU, FATHER.
YES, GO RIGHT AHEAD.
YOU'D BETTER DELIVER MY LETTER-TO THE FAMILY AS WELL.

KAKIMOTO WAS A GENUINE PROFES-SIONAL.

A PROFES-SIONAL SWORDS-MAN AS HE WAS...
...HE WAS DETERMINED TO HONOR THE TWENTY-YEAR-OLD VOW.


THAT'S A TYPICAL SWORDS-MAN.
IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO DIE.
SO WAS SHIMAOKA SENSEI.

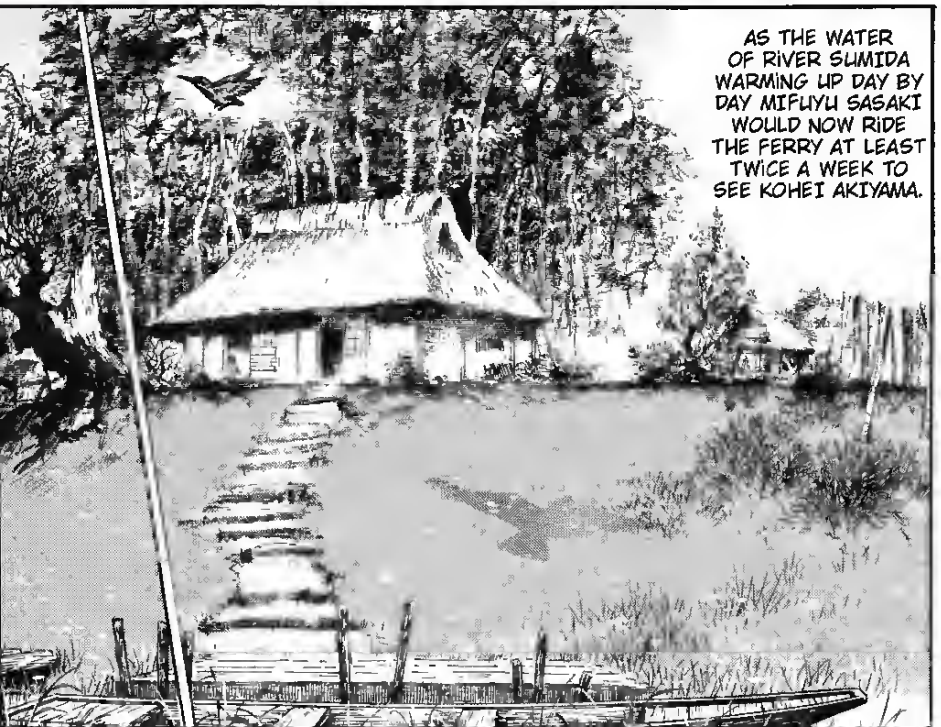
...EVEN IF KAKI-MOTO FINISHES HIM OFF.
HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE NO QUALMS ...
...
...FOR ME TO CHERISH FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.
HE GAVE ME A RARE SWORD AS SOUVENIR...
...
VERY PROFES-SIONAL, AND HUMAN AS WELL.
KAKIMOTO SHOULD HAVE BEEN THINKING THE SAME WAY.
THEY WERE BOTH PROFES-SIONAL SWORDS-MEN.

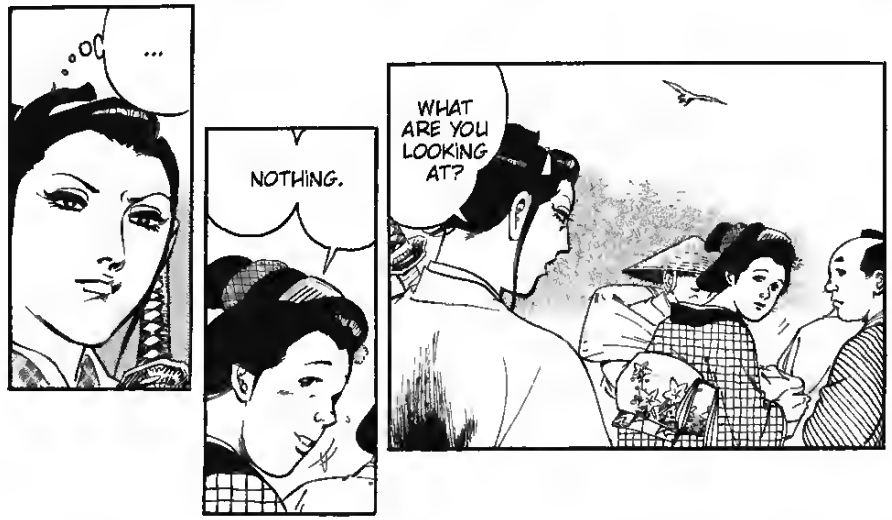
...
YES, THAT'S THE WAY SWORDS-MANSHIP IS.
PROFES-SIONAL AND HUMAN, AS WELL?
ALL OF A SUDDEN, A THUNDER BLITZ RAN STREAKING DOWN A CALM APRIL SKY.
J" O J" O J" O

Story 2 End

Story 3: Swordsman is GEISHA's Kin

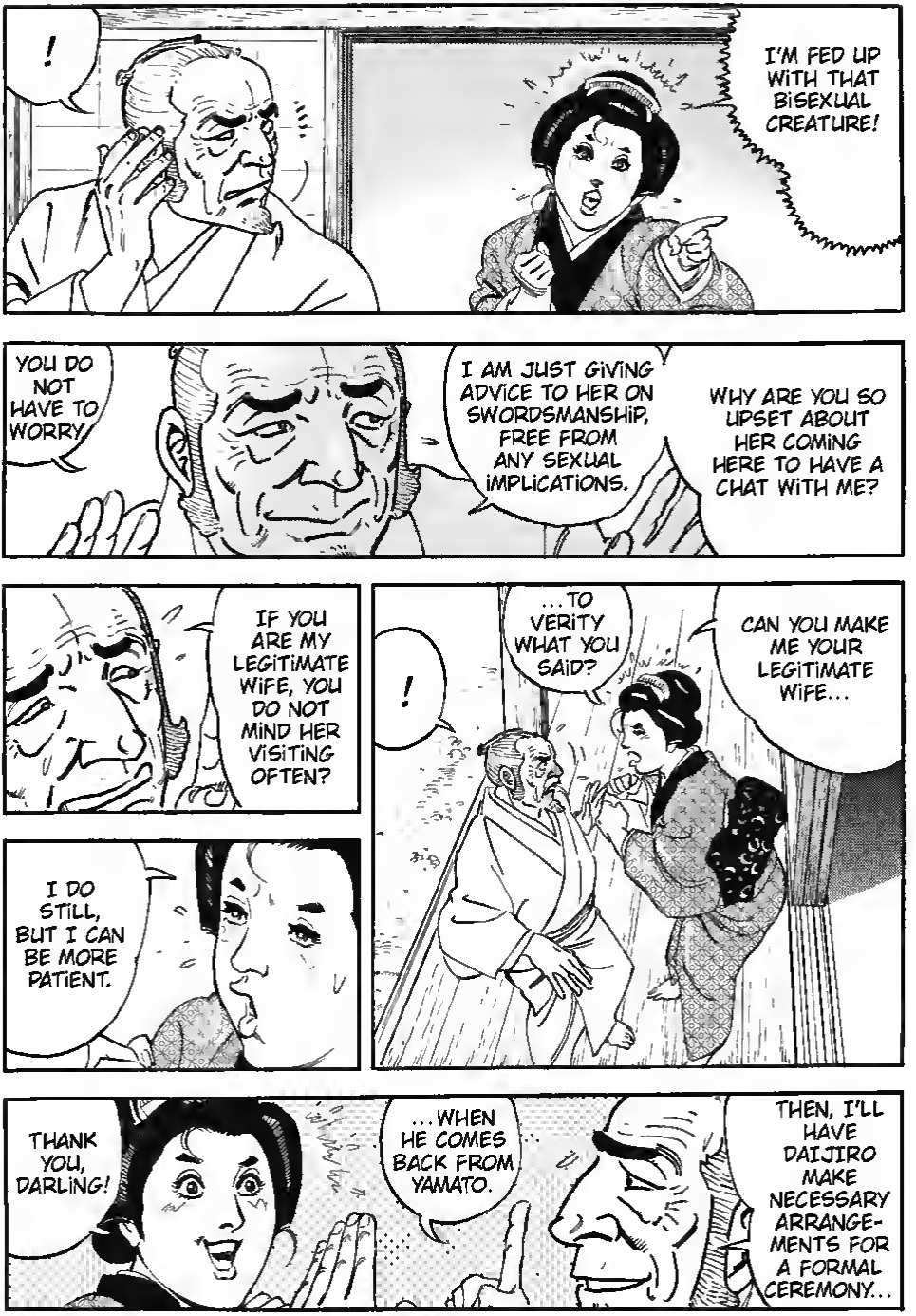
第三話 芸者変転


AS THE WATER OF RIVER SUMIDA WARMING UP DAY BY DAY MIFUYU SASAKI WOULD NOW RIDE THE FERRY AT LEAST TWICE A WEEK TO SEE KOHEI AKIYAMA.


...
NOTHING.
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

WHAT GOES ON BETWEEN THE TWO IS JUST A CASUAL TALK.
I AGREE THAT SWORDSMEN ARE PAMPERED NOW-A-DAYS.
BUT THEIR TOUGH TRAINING IS KID'S PLAY COMPARED WITH WHAT I EXPERI-ENCED.
I HEAR SWORDSMEN OF TODAY BRAG ABOUT TRAINING THE SEVERITY OF THE THEY ARE ENGAGED IN.
IT KEEPS ON STIMULATING MY MASCULINE INSTINCT.
THAT SEXY GLANCE OF HERS IS GETTING UN-BEARABLE.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT, SENSEI!
WHY THE SHOUTING YOUNG GIRL?
...MIFUYU COULD NOT UNDERSTAND OHARU'S REACTION.
STILL BEING IGNORANT OF THE SEXUAL ATTRACTION OVERWHELMING THE SCENE...
SHE JUDGED INNOCENTLY THAT IT WAS TIME FOR HER TO LEAVE.

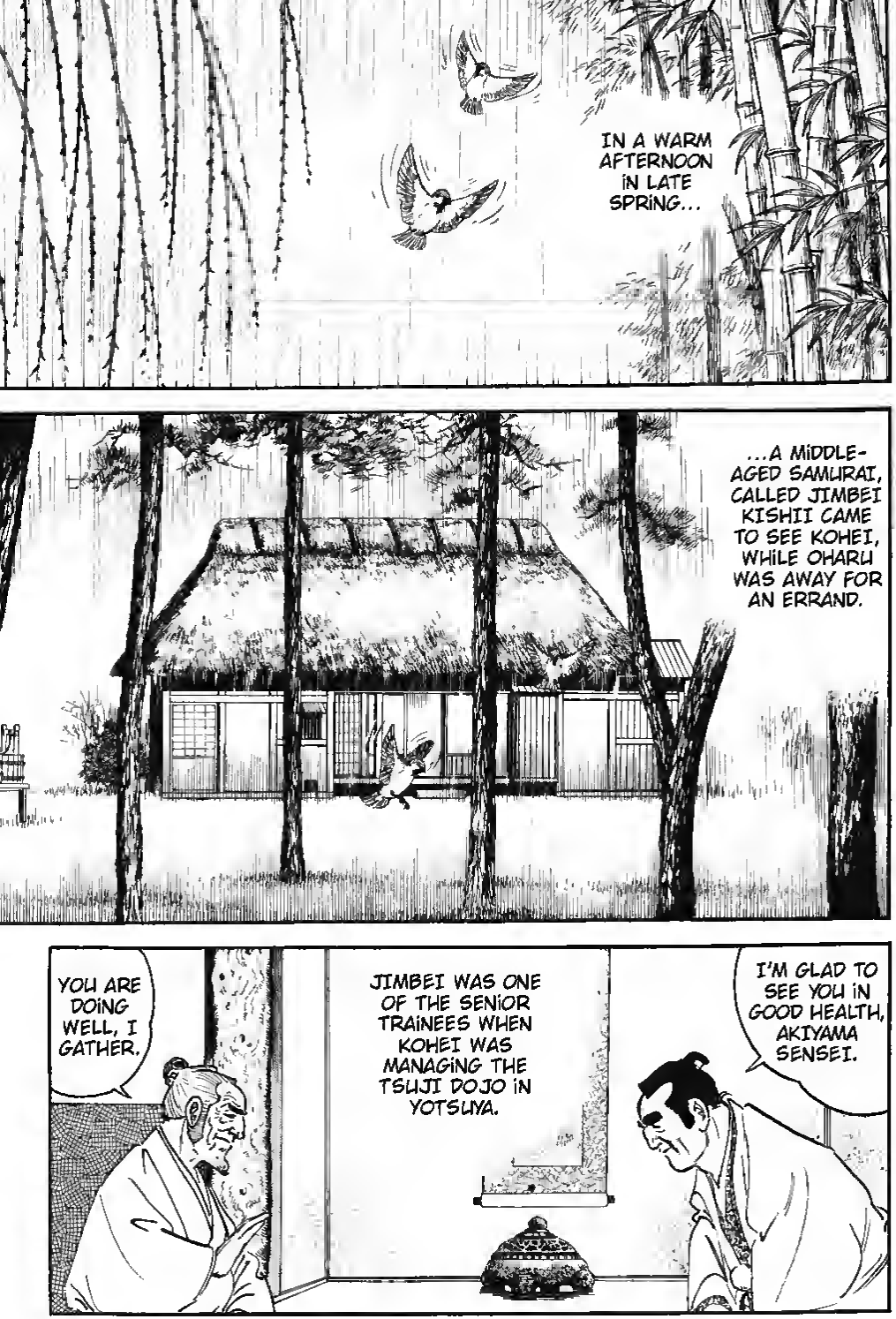

!
I'M FED UP WITH THAT BISEXUAL CREATURE!
YOU DO NOT HAVE TO WORRY.
I AM JUST GIVING ADVICE TO HER ON SWORDSMANSHIP, FREE FROM ANY SEXUAL IMPLICATIONS.
WHY ARE YOU SO UPSET ABOUT HER COMING HERE TO HAVE A CHAT WITH ME?
IF YOU ARE MY LEGITIMATE WIFE, YOU DO NOT MIND HER VISITING OFTEN?
I DO STILL, BUT I CAN BE MORE PATIENT.
!
...TO VERITY WHAT YOU SAID?
CAN YOU MAKE ME YOUR LEGITIMATE WIFE...
THANK YOU, DARLING!
...WHEN HE COMES BACK FROM YAMATO.
THEN, I'LL HAVE DAIJIRO MAKE NECESSARY ARRANGE-MENTS FOR A FORMAL CEREMONY...

AFTER REIZO SHIMAOKA DIED A TRAGIC DEATH AS A RESULT OF THE SURPRISED ATTACK BY GENSHICHIRO KAKIMOTO'S GANG A MONTH PRIOR, KOHEI HAD HIS SON DAIJIRO TAKE A TRIP TO YAMATO, REIZO'S NATIVE PLACE TO INFORM THE SURVIVING FAMILY ACCORDINGLY. DAIJIRO WAS DUE BACK AT EDO IN EARLY MAY.

NOW THAT HIS RIGHT ARM WAS CHOPPED OFF BY DAIJIRO, HE WOULD STAGE A REVENGE ATTACK AS LONG AS HE IS ALIVE.
I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE ARCHERY MASTER CALLED MITSUYA ITO WHO ESCAPED AFTER SHOOTING REIZO DOWN TO DEATH WITH A SINGLE LETHAL SHOT.

POOR DAIJIRO!
...AS LONG AS HE LIVES AS A PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMAN.
THAT'S A CURSE DAIJIRO IS SUPPOSED TO DEAL WITH...

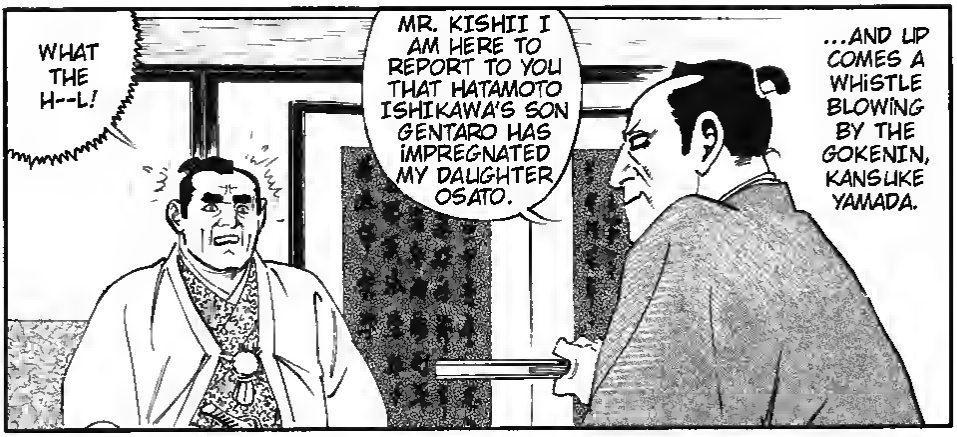
AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME DAIJIRO WAS NEARING SHIBA VILLAGE OF YAMATO, THE NATIVE PLACE OF THE DECEASED REIZO.

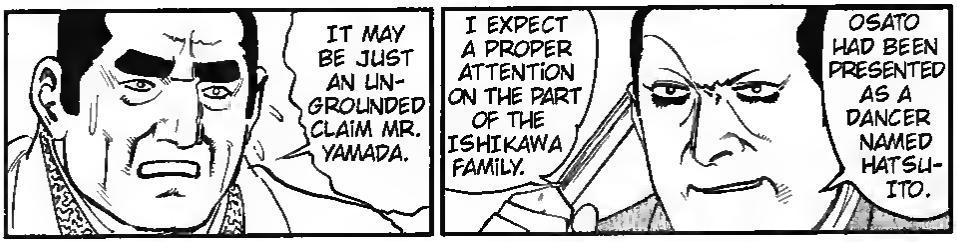

IN A WARM AFTERNOON IN LATE SPRING...
...A MIDDLE-AGED SAMURAI, CALLED JIMBEI KISHII CAME TO SEE KOHEI, WHILE OHARU WAS AWAY FOR AN ERRAND.
YOU ARE DOING WELL, I GATHER.
JIMBEI WAS ONE OF THE SENIOR TRAINEES WHEN KOHEI WAS MANAGING THE TSUJI DOJO IN YOTSUYA.
I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU IN GOOD HEALTH, AKIYAMA SENSEI.

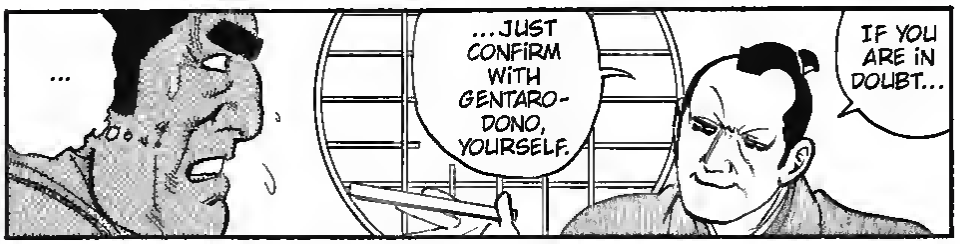
...OF THE DOJO IN YOTSUYA IN THOSE DAYS.
YOUR VISIT REMINDS ME OF THE HUSTLE AND THE BUSTLE ...
...TO SEE SENSEI IN GOOD HEALTH.
IT'S ENCOUR-AGING...
THERE IS A SERIOUS TROUBLE I WISH TO HAVE YOUR ADVICE ON BEFORE I TURN TIPSY ON SAKE.
NOW, ENJOY THIS PETIT ELBOW-BENDING SESSION TO EXCHANGE OLD SCORES BETWEEN US.
YOU WERE ALWAYS AT THE CORE OF THAT HUSTLE AND BUSTLE.
GO AHEAD! I'LL LISTEN!
THANK YOU, SENSEI.
COME ON! DON'T HESITATE!
WELL... AAA...
THAT'S OUTRA-GEOUS!
HE IS BEING BLACKMAILED BY A GOKENIN (EMPLOYEE OF HATAMOTO) CALLED KANSUKE YAMADA.
IT'S ABOUT HATAMOTO, KAI ISHIKAWA, WHO IS MY EMPLOYER.

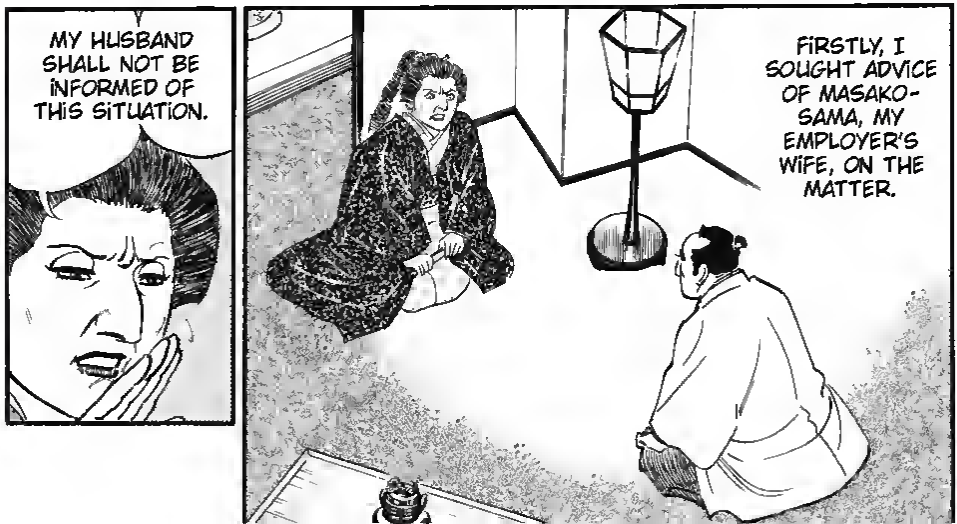
YES, BUT THERE'S A TWIST.
A GOKENIN IS BUT A SMALL FRY COMPARED TO HIM.
I KNOW YOUR EMPLOYER IS NOT A PLAIN HATAMOTO. HE IS ONE OF THE COUNCILORS SERVING THE SHOGUNATE GOVERNMENT, ISN'T HE?
IT'S HARD TO OVER-COME AUTISM, I HEAR.
HE HAS BEEN SUFFERING FROM AUTISM FOR MANY YEARS. HE IS STILL SINGLE.
THE TWIST IS CENTERED AROUND HIS SON NAMED GENTARO WHO IS TWENTY-ONE YEARS OLD.
THE SMALL FRY YAMADA STAGES A SERIES OF GEISHA PARTIES AT KAI ISHIKAWA'S VILLA PRESUMABLY TO CURE THE SON'S AUTISM.

SIR, CALL ME HATSU-ITO.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
GENTARO HAS BEEN MESMERIZED BY HATSUITO'S SEXUAL APPEAL...
COME CLOSER!
THAT'S A CHARMING NAME.
SEVERAL MONTHS HAVE GONE BY...
...AND WOULD SUMMON HATSUITO REPEATEDLY FOR PRIVATE SESSIONS AT THE FAMILY'S MAIN RESIDENCE IN KOHJI-MACHI.


WHAT THE H--L!
MR. KISHII I AM HERE TO REPORT TO YOU THAT HATAMOTO ISHIKAWA'S SON GENTARO HAS IMPREGNATED MY DAUGHTER OSATO.
...AND UP COMES A WHISTLE BLOWING BY THE GOKENIN, KANSUKE YAMADA.


IT MAY BE JUST AN UN-GROUNDED CLAIM MR. YAMADA.
I EXPECT A PROPER ATTENTION ON THE PART OF THE ISHIKAWA FAMILY.
OSATO HAD BEEN PRESENTED AS A DANCER NAMED HATSU-ITO.


...
...JUST CONFIRM WITH GENTARO-DONO, YOURSELF.
IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT...


MY HUSBAND SHALL NOT BE INFORMED OF THIS SITUATION.
FIRSTLY, I SOUGHT ADVICE OF MASAKO-SAMA, MY EMPLOYER'S WIFE, ON THE MATTER.

...
HAVE YOU BEEN SEXUALLY MIXED WITH THIS GEISHA?
DO YOU KNOW A GEISHA NAMED HATSUITO?
...
...IS TAKING THE TROUBLE OF ARRANGING A MATRIMONIAL TIE FOR YOU.
STUPID YOU! YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT HIS EXCELLENCY OKITSUGU TANUMA...
ANSWER ME, GENTARO!
AAAH... SORT OF YES.
I SINCERELY APOLOGIZE.
I CANNOT ALLOW MY SON TO DISGRACE MY FAMILY IN THIS FASHION.
YOUR WOULD-BE BRIDE IS A DAUGHTER OF HIS EXCELLENCY CHIKUGO IKOMA, A 7,000 KOKU STRONG HATAMOTO.

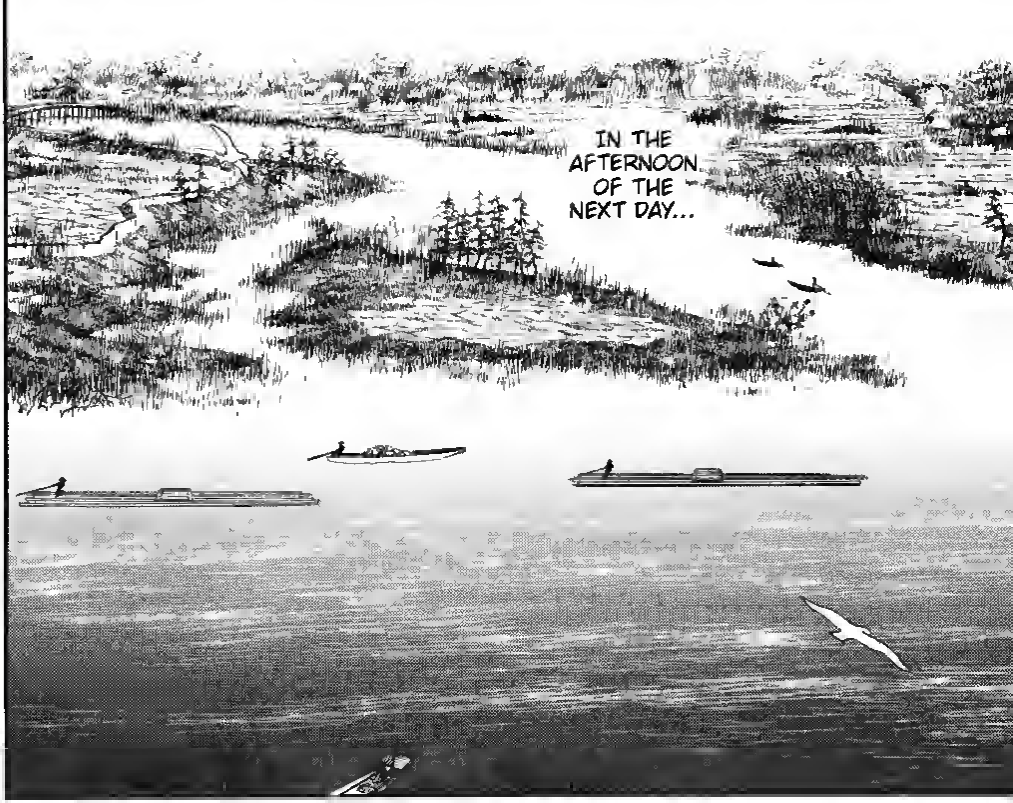
FOR YOU TO FORGET ABOUT IT.
WHAT'S THIS MONEY FOR?
YOU GO AND PAY THE GUY OFF.
THAT'S JUST OUTRA-GEOUS!
FOR ANY AMOUNT BELOW ONE THOUSAND RYO.
DON'T YOU MISTAKE ME FOR A CHEAPSKATE BLACK MAILER. YOU CANNOT SHUT ME UP...
THAT IS AN UTTER IMPOSSI-BILITY!
NO WAY, KISHII!
J---S!
...AS A SECOND WIFE OF GENTARO-DONO.
IF NOT, OSATO SHOULD BE ACCEPTED IN THE FAMILY ON A PERMANENT BASIS...

BUT HE WOULD NOT BUDGE.
THAT'S THE VERY THING I TOLD KANSUKE YAMADA.
IT IS BRAZEN CLEAR THAT A GEISHA GIRL HAS NO PLACE IN THE HONORABLE ISHIKAWA FAMILY.
...STRICTLY BETWEEN YOU AND ME!
NO, ABSOLUTELY NOT! THIS THING SHOULD BE KEPT...
MAY I GO TO HIS EXCELLENCY ISHIKAWA TO SEEK HIS ADVICE?
WHAT TYPE OF A PERSON IS YOUR MASTER KAI ISHIKAWA?
...NOR IS CAPABLE OF RAISING ONE THOUSAND RYO BRIBE MONEY TO SETTLE THE MATTER FOR GOOD.
THE ISHIKAWA FAMILY IS NOT INVESTED WITH LEGAL RIGHTS TO EXECUTE KANSUKE YAMADA...
I SEE.
...AND IS POPULAR AMONG LADIES OF THE OHOKU (THE OFFICIAL HAREM OF THE SHOGUNATE).
HE SERVES THE GOVERNMENT AS ONE OF THE KEY MEMBERS OF THE CABINET...

JIMBEI LEFT IN ABOUT AN HOUR WITHOUT GOING INTO A FULL-SWING ELBOW BENDING, WHEN OHARU CAME HOME.
SH-T!
THAT'S WHY THE TOKKURI (SAKE BOTTLE) IS LEFT BEHIND.
THE VISITOR WAS A SAMURAI.
SHE IS A TEETOTALLER, COME TO THINK OF IT.
H--L, NO!
YOU WERE ENTERTAINING THAT BI-SEXUAL SWORDSWOMAN AGAIN!

KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED, OHARU.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT OUR DAILY EXPENSES ANY MORE.
SO, YOU EARN A LOT OF RYO AS THE REWARD, DON'T YOU, SENSEI.
I'LL BE GETTING BUSY RENDERING CRITICAL SERVICES TO A CERTAIN HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL OF THE SHOGUNATE GOVERNMENT, OHARU.
LIFE IS BEAU-TIFUL!

LISTEN, BEFORE YOU GET TOO HOT.
THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT YOU TO DO TOMORROW.
LOVE ME HARD!
I WANT YOU TO RUN TO YOUR FATHER TOMORROW MORNING...
FORGET TOMORROW! LOVE ME HARD, NOW.
NO USE TALKING TO HER ANY MORE.
...AND I HAVE GOT AN IMPORTANT COURIER ASSIGNMENT FOR HIM.
GEE WHIZZ, I COME!!
AH, SUCK ME HARDER!

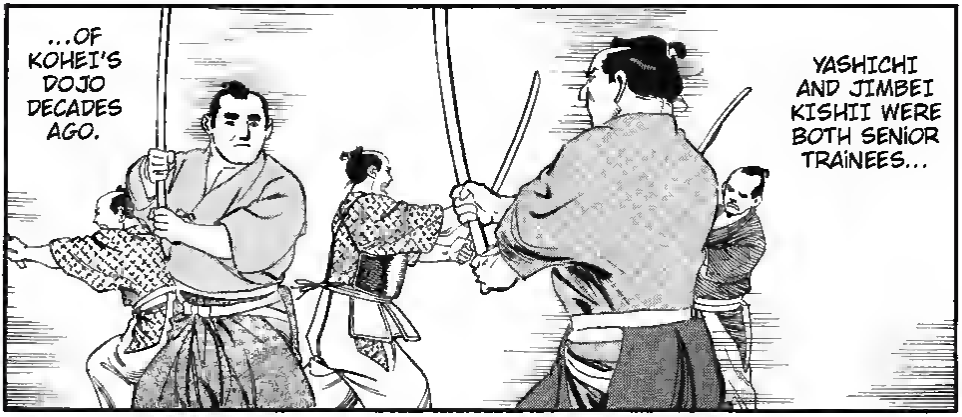

IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE NEXT DAY...

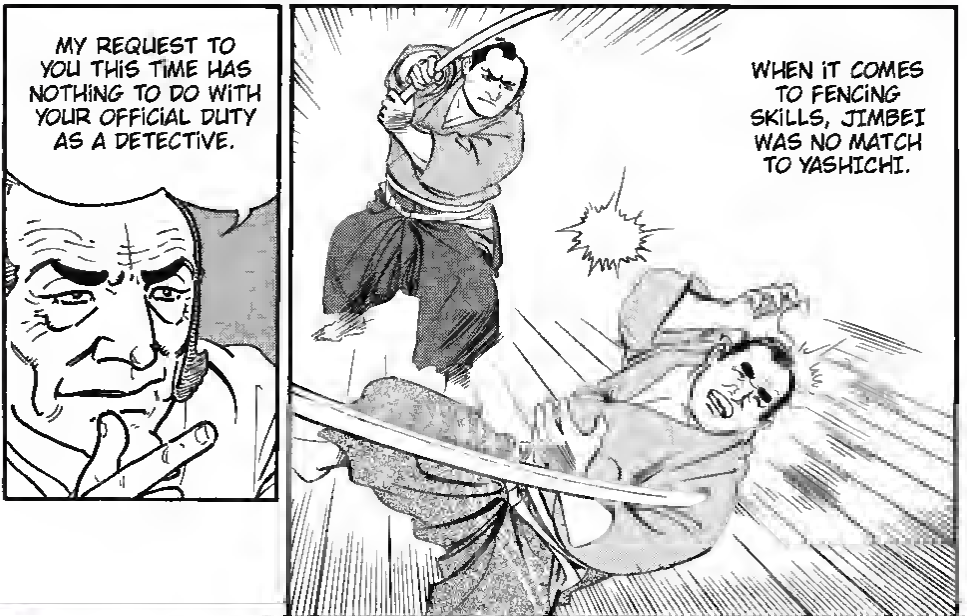
I'M IN NEED OF YOUR PROFES-SIONAL HELP FOR SOMETHING WHICH CROPPED UP OF LATE.

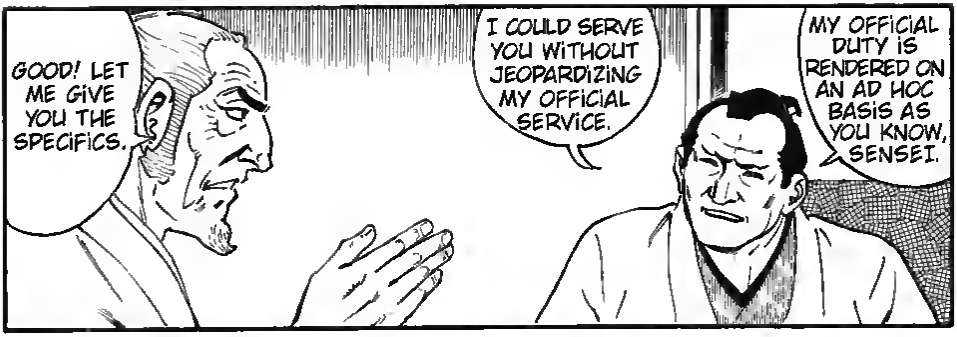
ALL RIGHT.
I WILL BE AT YOUR SERVICE AS ALWAYS.

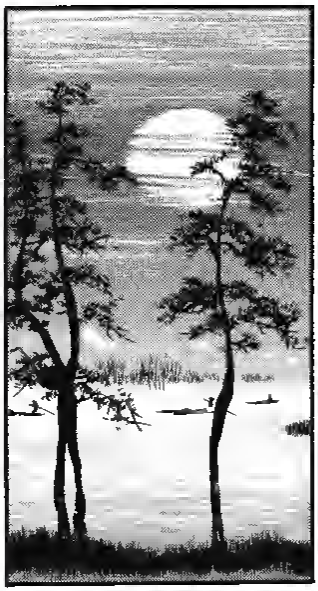
...DETECTIVE YASHICHI WAS SUMMONED TO KOHEI'S ABODE.

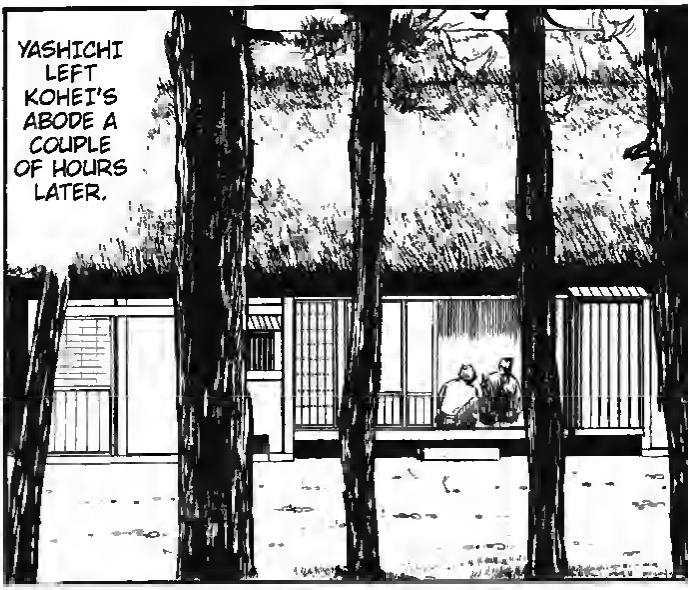
YES, I REMEMBER HIM VERY WELL.
THE MATTER HAS BEEN BROUGHT UP BY YOUR OLD COMRADE KISHII.

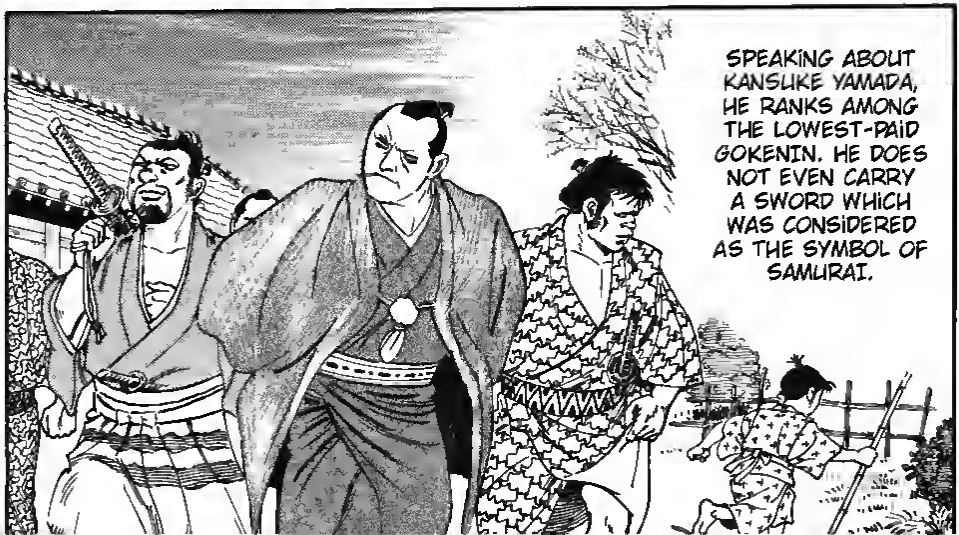

...OF KOHEI'S DOJO DECADES AGO.
YASHICHI AND JIMBEI KISHII WERE BOTH SENIOR TRAINEES...


MY REQUEST TO YOU THIS TIME HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR OFFICIAL DUTY AS A DETECTIVE.
WHEN IT COMES TO FENCING SKILLS, JIMBEI WAS NO MATCH TO YASHICHI.


GOOD! LET ME GIVE YOU THE SPECIFICS.
I COULD SERVE YOU WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING MY OFFICIAL SERVICE.
MY OFFICIAL DUTY IS RENDERED ON AN AD HOC BASIS AS YOU KNOW, SENSEI.




YASHICHI LEFT KOHEI'S ABODE A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER.


SPEAKING ABOUT KANSUKE YAMADA, HE RANKS AMONG THE LOWEST-PAID GOKENIN. HE DOES NOT EVEN CARRY A SWORD WHICH WAS CONSIDERED AS THE SYMBOL OF SAMURAI.

HE EARNS HIS LIVELIHOOD PRIMARILY THROUGH BLACK-MAILING, GANGED UP WITH LOCAL HOOLIGANS.

SHOGUN-ATE'S OFFICIAL ORDER PROHIBITS GOKENIN TO PRACTICE GAMBLING.

HE HAS BEEN ADDICTED WITH SAKE FOR DECADES, AND IS A FREQUENT VISITOR TO LOCAL GAMBLING JOINTS.

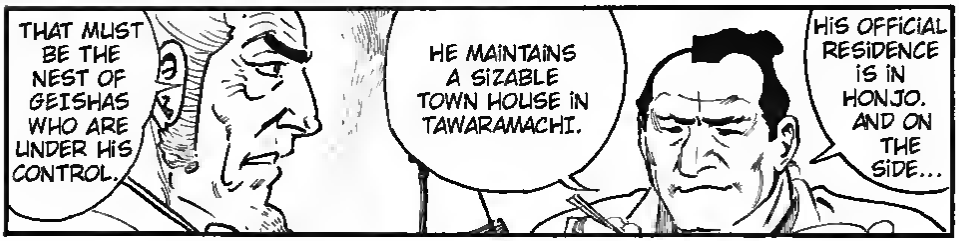
THERE GOES OSATO...

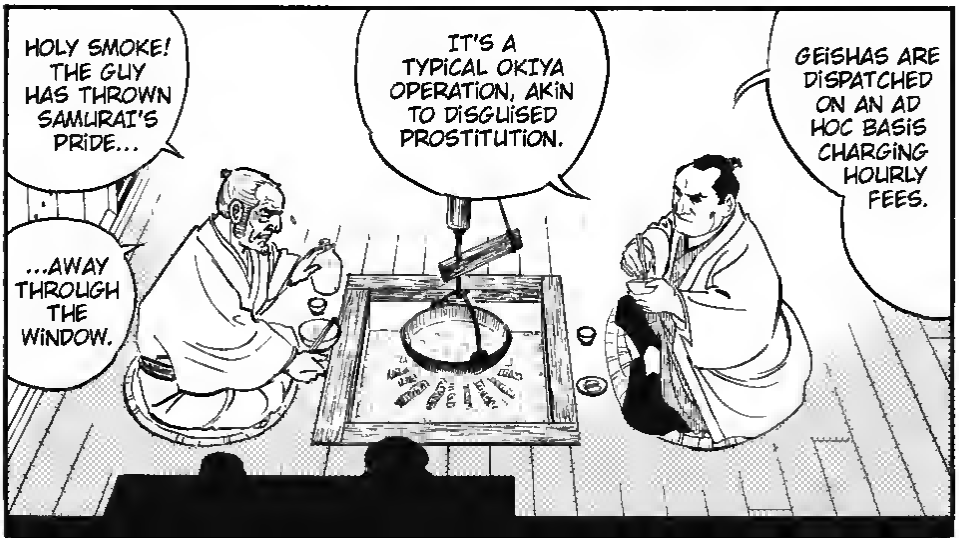
...THE GEISHA GIRL SENSEI WAS TALKING ABOUT.

THE GEISHA CATERING SERVICE IS PROS-PERING.

YASHICHI OPERATES A PRIVATE ESPIONAGE NETWORK CONSISTING A NUMBER OF INFORMERS COLLOQUIALLY CALLED OKAPPIKI.

I GATHERED SOME INTERESTING DATA ABOUT KANSUKE YAMADA.


THAT MUST BE THE NEST OF GEISHAS WHO ARE UNDER HIS CONTROL.
HE MAINTAINS A SIZABLE TOWN HOUSE IN TAWARAMACHI.
HIS OFFICIAL RESIDENCE IS IN HONJO. AND ON THE SIDE...

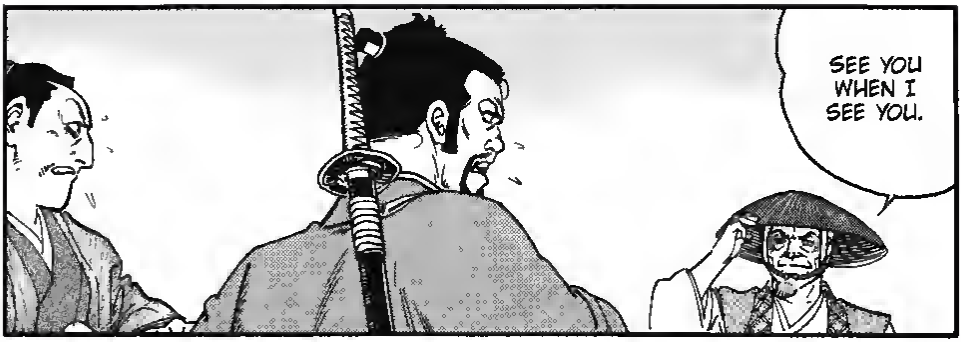

HOLY SMOKE! THE GUY HAS THROWN SAMURAI'S PRIDE...
IT'S A TYPICAL OKIYA OPERATION, AKIN TO DISGUISED PROSTITUTION.
GEISHAS ARE DISPATCHED ON AN AD HOC BASIS CHARGING HOURLY FEES.
...AWAY THROUGH THE WINDOW.

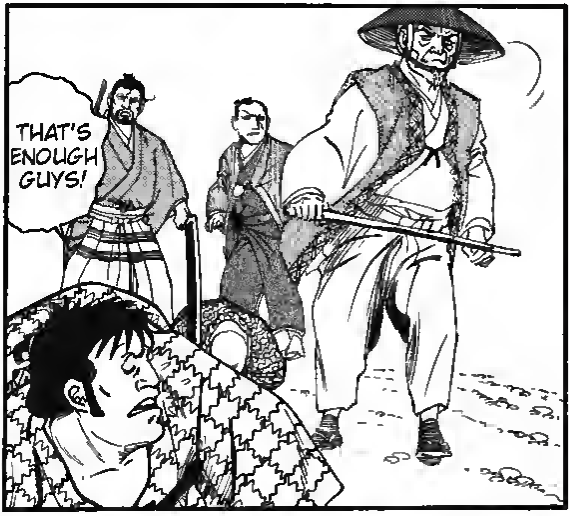
...A PERSON VERSED IN SOME ART.
GEI MEANS ART AND SHA MEANS PERSON. SO GEISHA LITERALLY MEANS...
OSATO, PROFESSIONALLY KNOWN AS HATSUITO, IS EXTREMELY POPULAR AMONG THE RESTAURANT CLIENTELE.
...
"BU" MEANS MARTIAL ARTS. THEREFORE, LITERALLY SPEAKING SWORDSMAN IS A TYPE OF GEISHA.
SWORDSMAN USED TO BE CALLED "BU-GEISHA"
FUJIRO IS MY FAVORITE RESTAURANT.
I WAS INFORMED THAT YAMADA FREQUENTS A RESTAURANT NAMED FUJIRO.
INCIDENTALLY, SENSEI ...
I WILL EXPLORE FUJIRO ON MY OWN.
I KNOW THAT THE RESTAURANT IS AN IDEAL VENUE FOR CONSPIRACY DISCUSSIONS.

YOU'RE IN THE WAY.
GET THE H--L OFF MY WAY, OLD MAN!

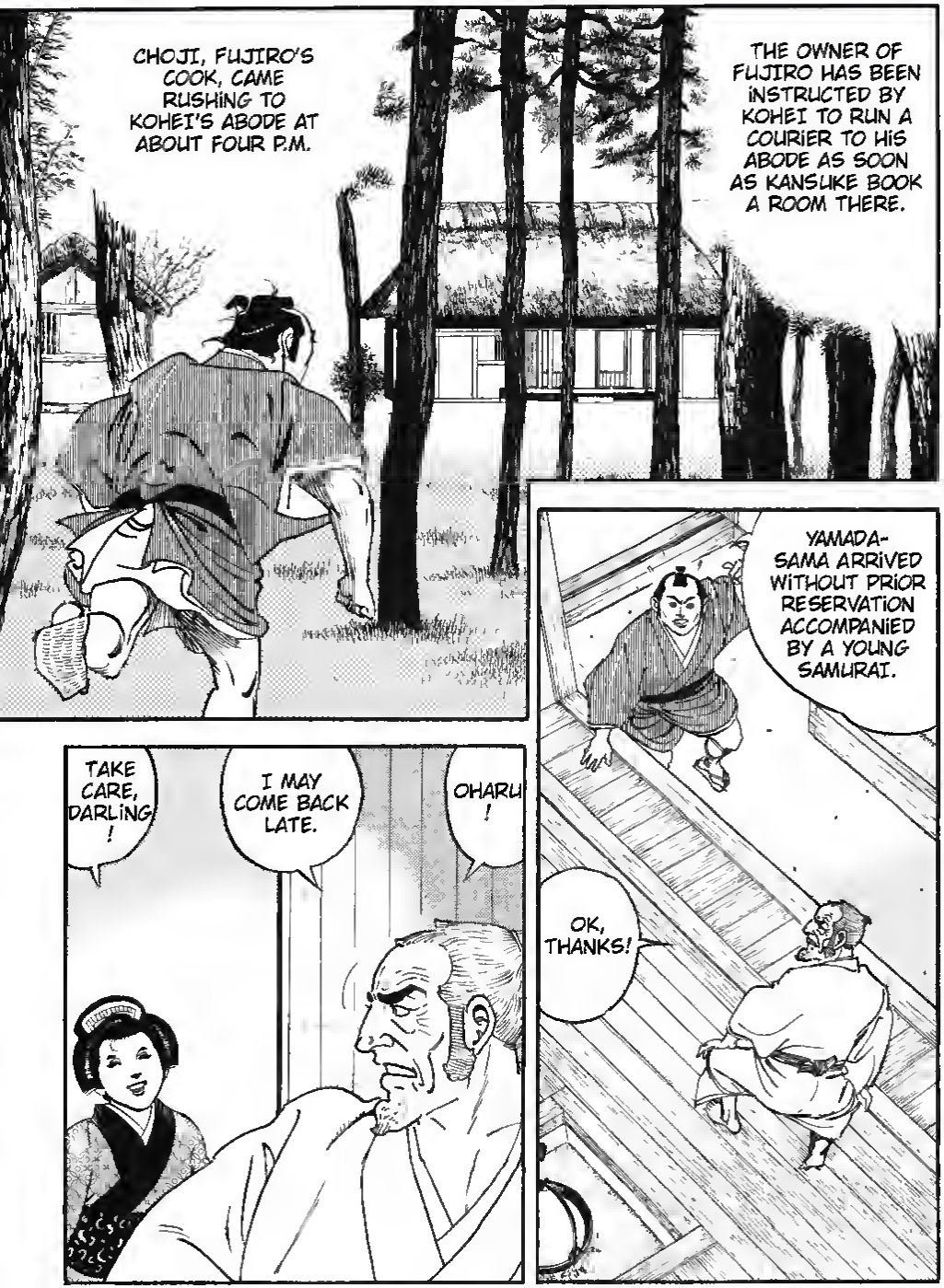
CUT OUT THAT BACK TALK, OLD MAN!
F--K YOU!
YOU ARE THE ONES THAT ARE IN MY WAY.
...OBSTRUCTING MY PASSAGE THROUGH A PUBLIC ROAD.
I DO NOT WANT PETTY SWINDLERS LIKE YOU BASTARDS...
GO TO H--L!
YOU SH--Y OLD STICK!

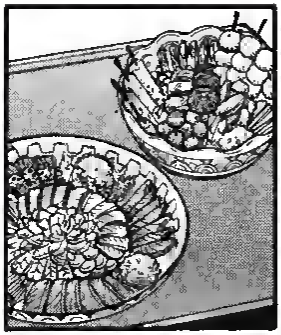
GOO--FF!
CUT OUT THAT S---Y NON SENSE.
...ATTEMPING TO SUCK BLOOD OUT OF THAT OLD STICK.
AND YOU ARE A BUNCH OF LEECHES ...
I'LL KILL YOU!
WAATZ!
H--L WITH YOU!


SEE YOU WHEN I SEE YOU.

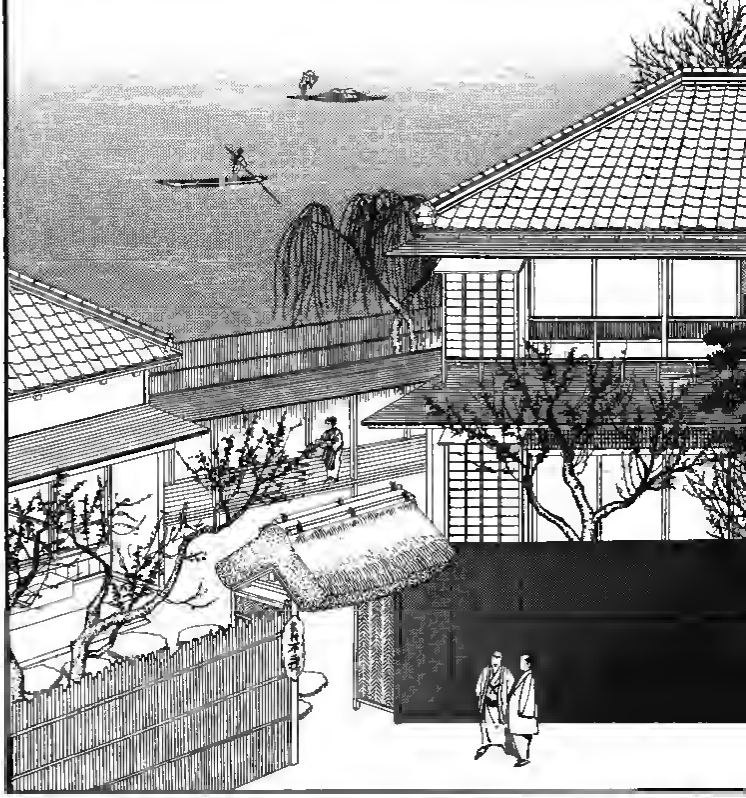

THAT'S ENOUGH GUYS!

I'VE NO IDEA.
WHAT THE H--L IS HE?
A TOUGH BASTARD!


CHOJI, FUJIRO'S COOK, CAME RUSHING TO KOHEI'S ABODE AT ABOUT FOUR P.M.
THE OWNER OF FUJIRO HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED BY KOHEI TO RUN A COURIER TO HIS ABODE AS SOON AS KANSUKE BOOK A ROOM THERE.
YAMADA-SAMA ARRIVED WITHOUT PRIOR RESERVATION ACCOMPANIED BY A YOUNG SAMURAI.
OK, THANKS!
OHARU!
I MAY COME BACK LATE.
TAKE CARE, DARLING!



FUJIRO'S USUAL POSH SERVICE!



...IF YOU ARE CAREFUL OF EAVES-DROPPING,
REMEMBER, SCREEN DOORS SHOULD BE LEFT WIDE OPEN...
OH, I SEE!

EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LAID DOWN IN APPLE PIES, ORDER WHILE WE WERE TAKING A BATH.

WE HAVE TO NEUTRALIZE HIM SOMEHOW.
THAT STICK WAS TOUGH ENOUGH TO BEAT YOUR MEN IN NO TIME.
IT PAYS TO BE DOUBLE CAUTIOUS AS THAT OLD STICK MAY BE HANGING AROUND.
THAT OLD STICK WILL KNOW NOTHING ABOUT OUR SCHEME.
DON'T YOU WORRY. THAT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT.
...OR IN THE ADJACENT WASH ROOM.
...UNLESS HE IS EAVESROPPING US RIGHT NOW BEHIND THE SCREEN DOOR...
I'LL KEEP MY FINGERS CROSSED.
FRANKLY, I WOULD BE READY TO CLOSE THE DEAL FOR SEVEN OR EIGHT HUNDRED RYO.

I REALLY LOOK FORWARD TO THAT DAY.
AS SOON AS THE DEAL COMES THROUGH YOU CAN QUIT THE SERVICE AND MARRY OSATO WITH MY BLESSINGS.
YOU WORRY TOO MUCH.
MY LIRS WILL STAY SEALED FOR GOOD.
...THAT YOU REALLY ARE THE FATHER OF OSATO'S BABY.
THE STUPID ASS GENTARO WOULD NEVER KNOW...
...
MY AMBITION IS TO START A SLICK GEISHA RESTAU-RANT.
OSATO WAS ALREADY IN THE FIRST TRIMESTER WHEN THAT BASTARD TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HER.
I'LL GO CHECK THE BATH ROOM, JUST IN CASE.

H--L!
WHAT HAP-PENED!
IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG?
HOW COME YOU...!
I HEARD iT ALL, YOU BASTARDS!

?
H--L!
YOU RASCAL!
!!
IS THIS OLD MAN HAPPENS TO BE HERE.
WHY THE H--L...
...
THAT'S FOR ME TO SAY.
...
...
GONNA BE EXPOSED YAMADA!
YOUR DIRTY TRICK IS...

SHUCKS!
HE IS ALSO EMPLOYED BY COUNCILOR KAI ISHIKAWA.
I UNDERSTAND THAT THE PETTY PUNK THERE IS NAMED HORIGOME.
...
YOU ARE A TRAITOR.
YOU TREACHEROUSLY SCHEME TO RUIN ISHIKAWA JUNIOR TAKING ADVANTAGE OF YOUR LECHERY PASSION.
NOOPF!!
KYEEH!

SHUKS!

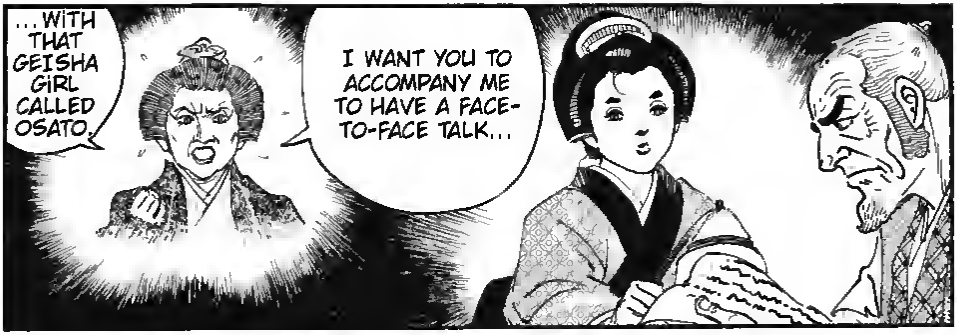
Z!!
I'M HERE TO ORDER YOU TO STAY AWAY FROM ILL DOINGS.
LISTEN! MY NAME IS DAIGORO HARUKAWA. I'M A NINJA INSPECTOR WORKING FOR THE SHOGUN-ATE.
YOUR RESISTANCE IS OF NO VAIL.
A SHOGUN-ATE'S INSPECTOR?
WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO ABOUT THIS, SENSEI?
PROVIDED THEY PAY THE BILL AND LEAVE IN PEACE.
JUST FORGET IT.

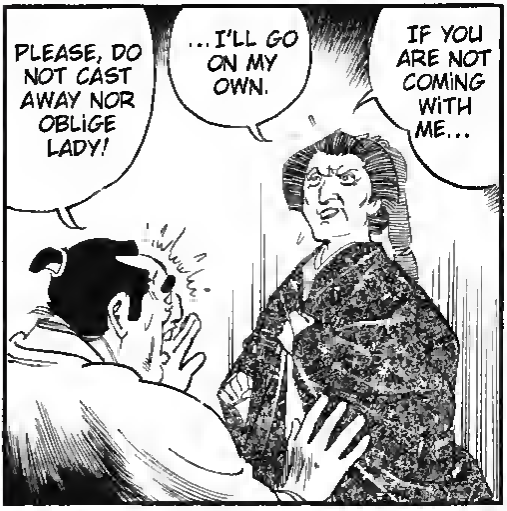
WHAT HAP-PENED?

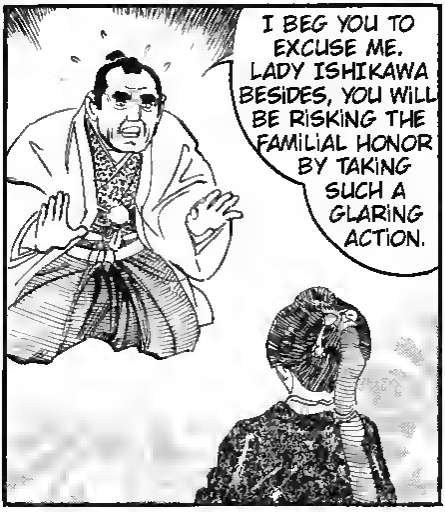
WHO IS THIS SAMU-RAI?
WHAT HAP-PENED?

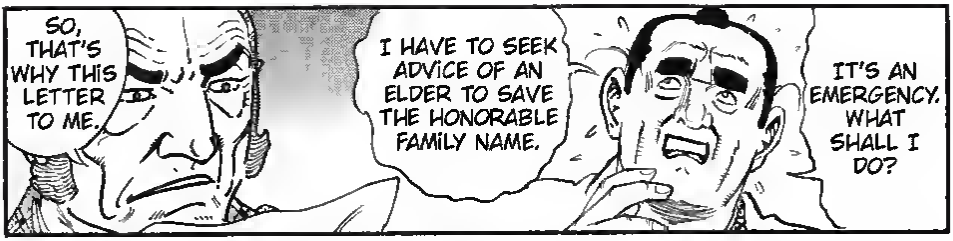
AH, SENSEI IS BACK!

TELL YOUR MASTER THAT I'LL REACT ACCORD-INGLY.
HE SAID THE LETTER CONTAINS AN URGENT MESSAGE.
MY NAME IS KAZUNOSUKE SATO, I'VE COME TO DELIVER TO YOU THIS LETTER FROM MY MASTER JIMBEI KISHII.


...WITH THAT GEISHA GIRL CALLED OSATO.
I WANT YOU TO ACCOMPANY ME TO HAVE A FACE-TO-FACE TALK...


PLEASE, DO NOT CAST AWAY NOR OBLIGE LADY!
...I'LL GO ON MY OWN.
IF YOU ARE NOT COMING WITH ME...


I BEG YOU TO EXCUSE ME. LADY ISHIKAWA BESIDES, YOU WILL BE RISKING THE FAMILIAL HONOR BY TAKING SUCH A GLARING ACTION.


SO, THAT'S WHY THIS LETTER TO ME.
I HAVE TO SEEK ADVICE OF AN ELDER TO SAVE THE HONORABLE FAMILY NAME.
IT'S AN EMERGENCY. WHAT SHALL I DO?

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO SENSEI?
WALK BACK HOME, OHARU, AND WAIT FOR ME THERE. IT WON'T BE LONG.

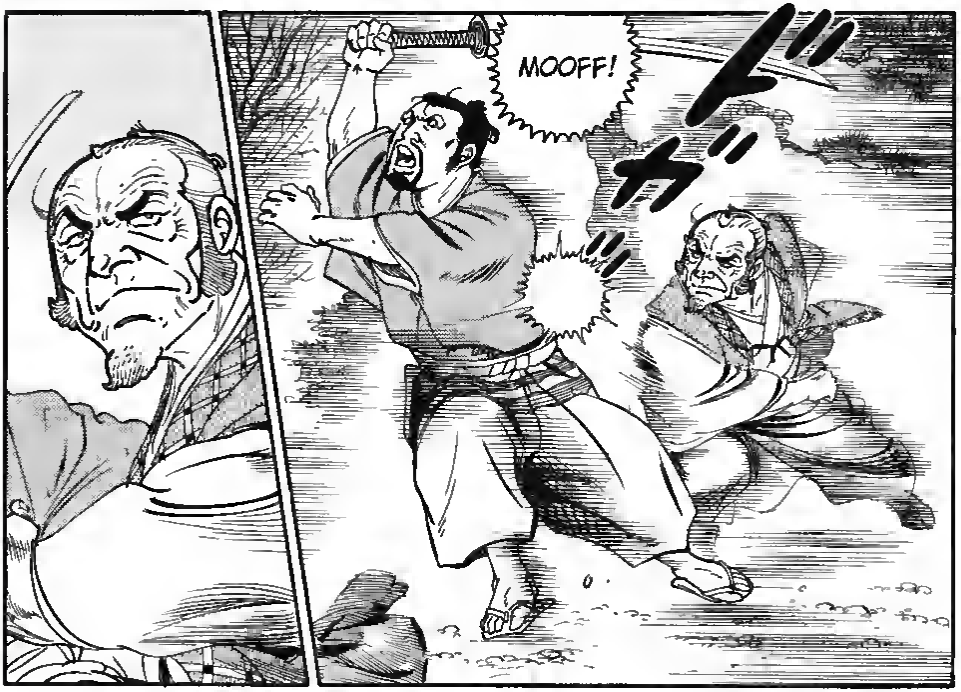
!

ON THE REQUEST OUTLINED IN THE LETTER.
PLEASE REPORT BACK TO MR.KISHII THAT KOHEI WOULD REACT WITH UTMOST EXPEDI-ENCY.

AMAZINGLY DYNAMIC MOVE FOR HIS AGE!
SENSEI IS DYNAMIC ON ALL THREE LEGS.
SPLENDID, SENSEI!
WHAT A WITTY EXPRESSION!
KOHEI ARRIVED AT THE SCENE IN LESS THAN AN HOUR.
A COMMOTION INSIDE?
KANSUKE YAMADA'S VILLA IS IN TAWARA-MACHI.

!!
ナ
ナ
ッ
HELP!

キィーン
ドッ!!
WAAA!
HICK!


MOOFF!
ドッ!!
ガッ!!

GO TO HELL!
ビュッ
WOOF!
SO, IT'S YOU AGAIN!

YOU F--KING OLD STICK!
!!
NWOAA!

バキッ

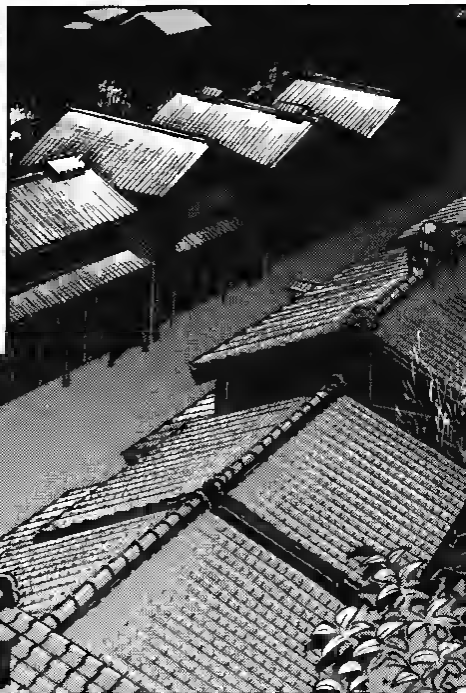
ドオ…

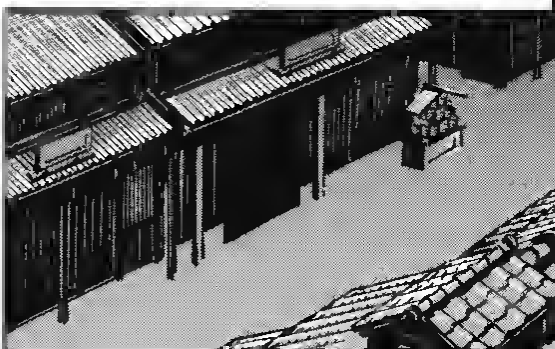
LET'S GET THE H--L OUT OF HERE!
YOU ARRIVED HERE IN TIME, SENSEI.
YOU FOOL!
...
DON'T YOU EVER RESORT TO SUCH RASH ACTION AGAIN.
A LADY IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE PRU-DENCE.

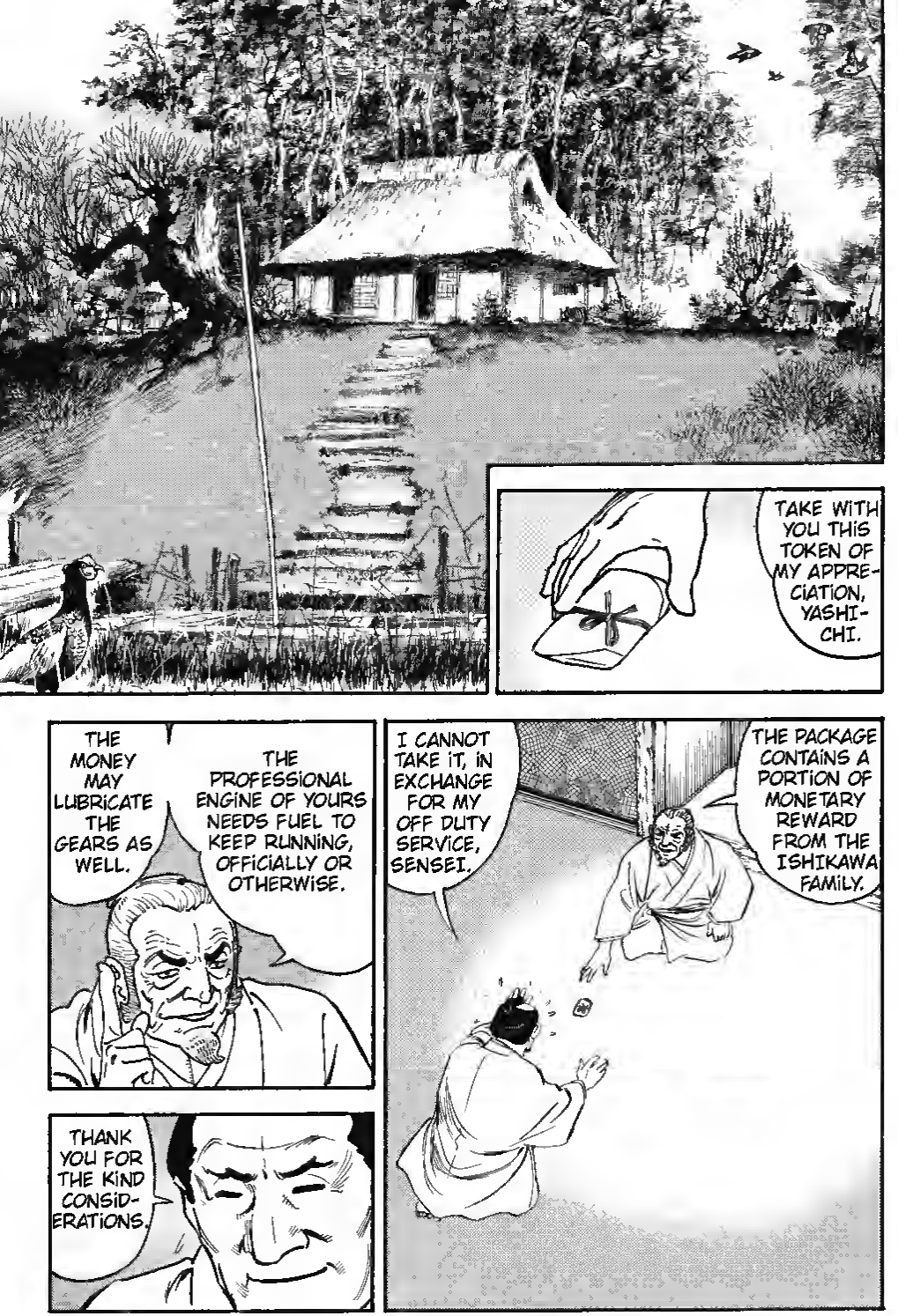
I WANT YOU TO GUARD THE HONOR OF MY DOJO!
YOU ARE MY EX-TRAINEE!
THOUSANDS OF THANKS, SENSEI.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU.
BE SURE TO ESCORT LADY ISHIKAWA BACK TO HER PLACE THROUGH THE BACK GATE.
HERE IS A LETTER OF APOLOGY SIGNED BY KANSUKE YAMADA PERSONALLY.

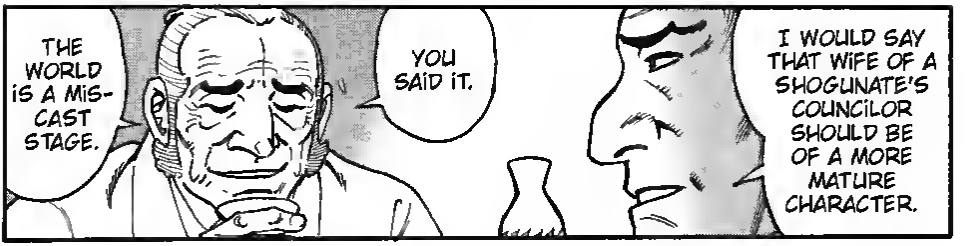
...





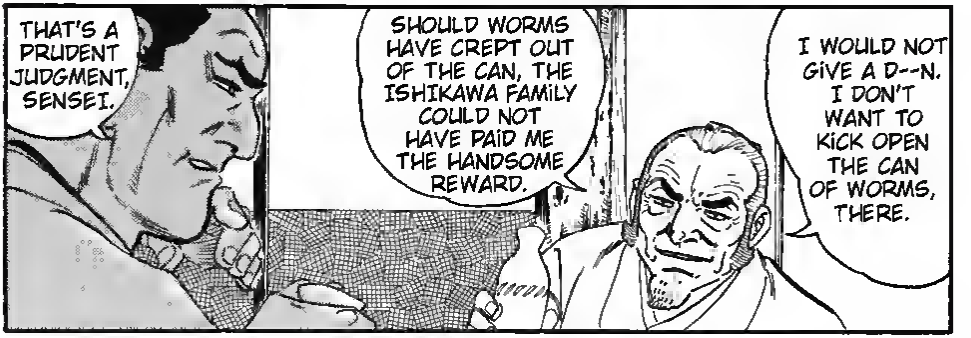

TAKE WITH YOU THIS TOKEN OF MY APPRECIATION, YASHICHI.
I CANNOT TAKE IT, IN EXCHANGE FOR MY OFF DUTY SERVICE, SENSEI.
THE PACKAGE CONTAINS A PORTION OF MONETARY REWARD FROM THE ISHIKAWA FAMILY.
THE MONEY MAY LUBRICATE THE GEARS AS WELL.
THE PROFESSIONAL ENGINE OF YOURS NEEDS FUEL TO KEEP RUNNING, OFFICIALLY OR OTHERWISE.
THANK YOU FOR THE KIND CONSIDERATIONS.

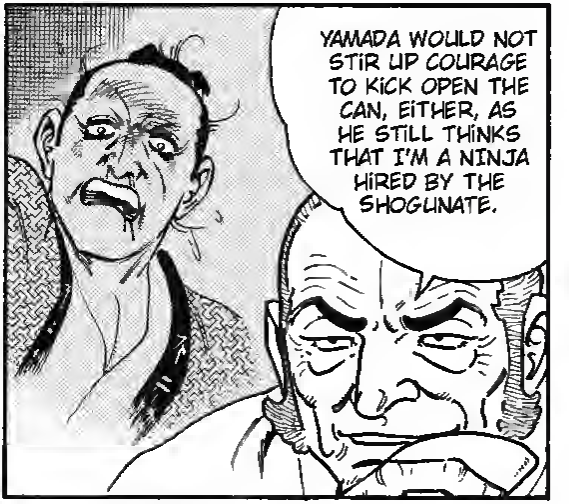
THANK YOU AGAIN.
...
YOU ARE CONSID-ERATE, AS USUAL.
HOPEFULLY, A PORTION OF THE LUBRICATION WOULD COVER YOUR FAMILY, AS WELL.
I AM REALLY HONORED TO BE A PART OF THE FEAST, SENSEI.
HERE COME SASHIMI OF CARP AND SAKE FROM MY FAVORITE BREWERY. LET'S CELEBRATE.
...
...THAT THE WORLD DOES NOT REVOLVE ON JUSTICE ALONE.
LADY ISHIKAWA IS OF STRAIGHT FORWARD DISPOSITION. SHE SHOULD COME TO REALIZE...


THE WORLD IS A MIS-CAST STAGE.
YOU SAID IT.
I WOULD SAY THAT WIFE OF A SHOGUNATE'S COUNCILOR SHOULD BE OF A MORE MATURE CHARACTER.

WHAT HAPPENED TO KANSUKE YAMADA?

HOW COME A TOUGH TREE LIKE LADY ISHIKAWA BORE A PALE FRUIT LIKE GENTARO? AGAIN, A MISCAST.
BUT I APPRECIATE HER COURGAGE.


THAT'S A PRUDENT JUDGMENT, SENSEI.
SHOULD WORMS HAVE CREPT OUT OF THE CAN, THE ISHIKAWA FAMILY COULD NOT HAVE PAID ME THE HANDSOME REWARD.
I WOULD NOT GIVE A D--N. I DON'T WANT TO KICK OPEN THE CAN OF WORMS, THERE.

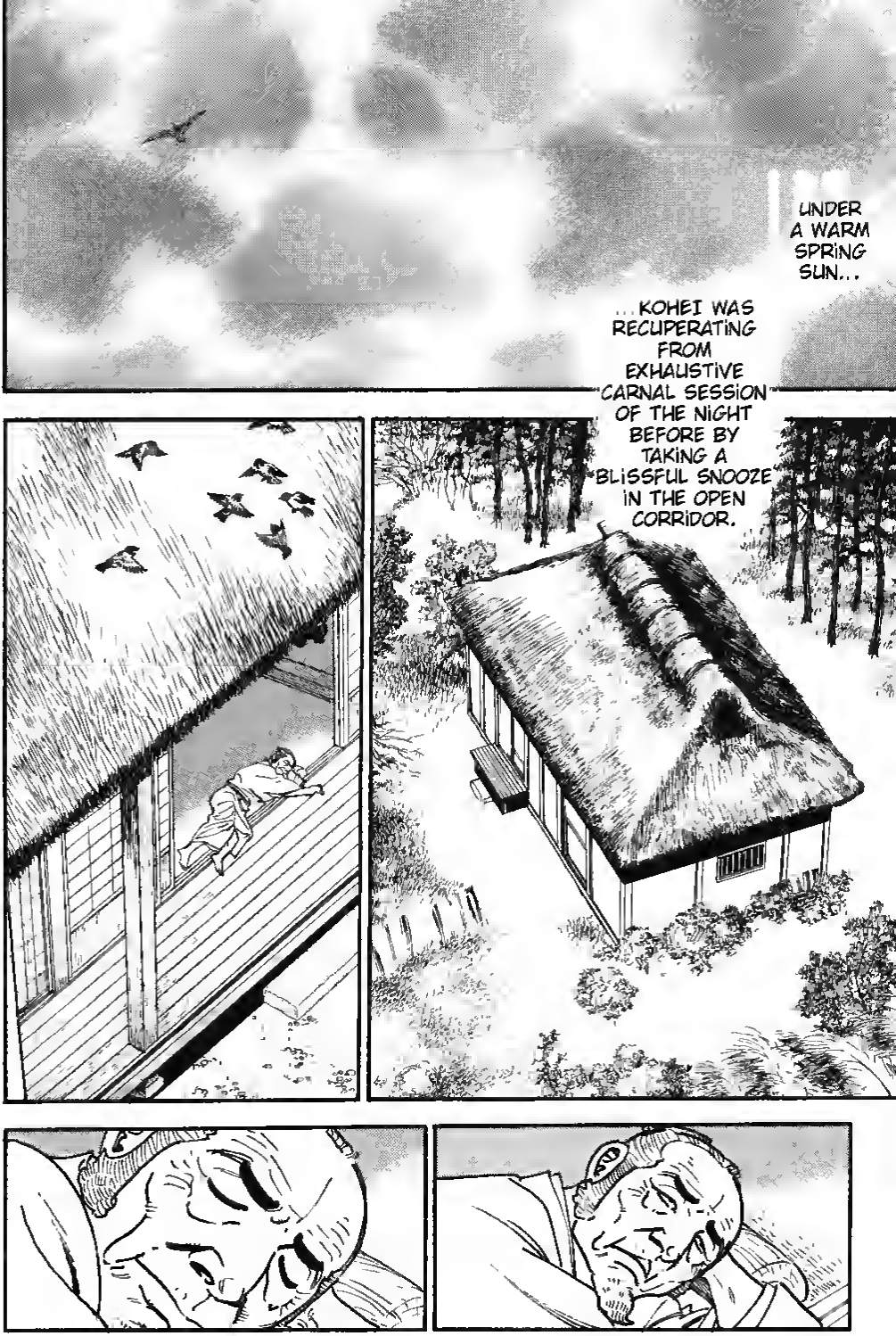

YAMADA WOULD NOT STIR UP COURAGE TO KICK OPEN THE CAN, EITHER, AS HE STILL THINKS THAT I'M A NINJA HIRED BY THE SHOGUNATE.

...
A GOOD HUMAN CHARACTER ALONE DOES NOT MAKE A GOOD SAMURAI BY ITSELF.
INCIDENTALLY, YOUR OLD COMRADE JINBEI HASN'T ADVANCED MUCH IN FENCING SKILLS.
LIVE THE YOUTHFUL SENSEI FOREVER.
WE CAN NOW AFFORD BETTER QUALITY FOOD AND CLOSING.
IT'S DEPLORABLE THAT GEISHA OR ARTS PERSON MEANS NO OTHER THAN A FEMALE ENTERTAINER.
SWORDSMEN WERE ORIGINALLY CALLED BU-GEISHA OR MARTIAL (BU) -ARTS (GEI) -PERSON (SHA).

Story 3 End

第四話 井関道場・四天王

Story 4 : Farewell to the ISEKI DOJO

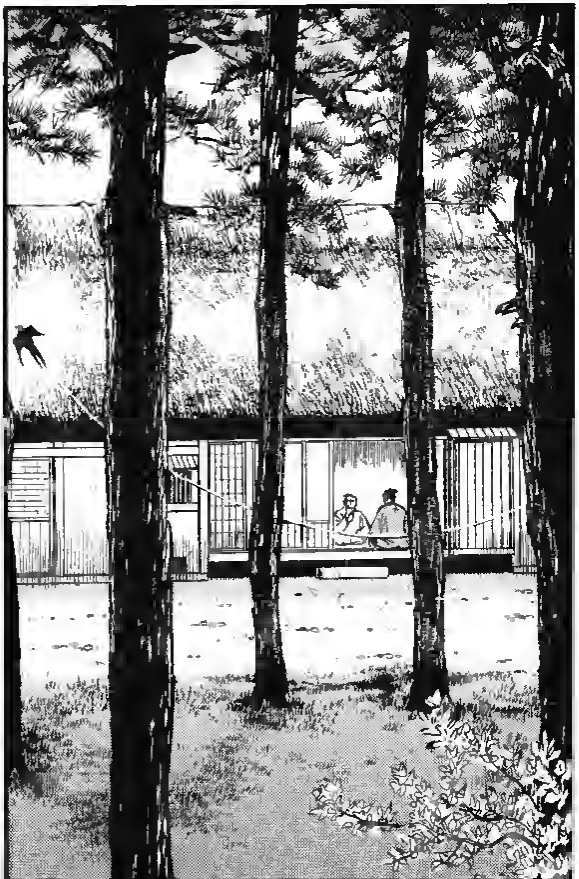

UNDER A WARM SPRING SUN...
...KOHEI WAS RECUPERATING FROM EXHAUSTIVE CARNAL SESSION OF THE NIGHT BEFORE BY TAKING A BLISSFUL SNOOZE IN THE OPEN CORRIDOR.

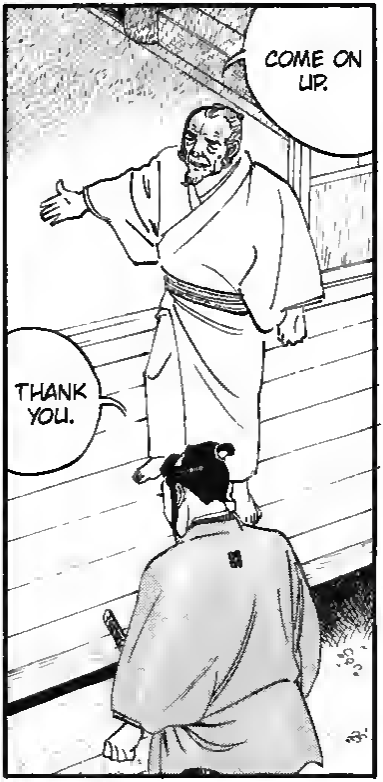
WHY DIDN'T YOU MAKE ME UP?
?
IT WAS MY PLEASURE TO BE ABLE TO WATCH YOUR RELAXED POSTURE FOR A WHILE, SENSEI.
I'M GLAD, THAT OHARU IS NOT HERE TODAY TO RING HER BELL OF JEALOUSY.
I'M ASHAMED OF HAVING EXPOSED SUCH A COMPROMISING POSTURE.

I'M READY TO LISTEN, MIFUYU.
...I WANT TO SEEK YOUR ADVICE ON.
TODAY'S VISIT IS SPECIAL, AS I'VE GOT A SERIOUS MATTER...

...THE ELITE TRAINEES OF THE DOJO, AREN'T YOU.
YOU ARE ONE OF ...

...THE FUTURE OF THE ISEKI DOJO.
THE ISSUE AT STAGE IS...




COME ON UP.
THANK YOU.

HE WAS WELL RESPECTED FOR HIS SUPERB SWORDS-MANSHIP AS WELL AS HIS VIRTUOUS PERSON-ALITY.
YES, OF COURSE.
DID YOU KNOW CHUHACHIRO ISEKI, WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE DOJO?
THERE ARE SOME 200 TRAINEES CURRENTLY BELONGING TO THE DOJO.
THANK YOU. UPON HIS DEMISE, WE FOUR SENIOR TRAINEES TOOK OVER THE OPERATION JOINTLY...
NOW THE TIME HAS COME TO PICK THE HEAD LEADER OR SUCCESSOR OF THE ISEKI DOJO.

...
I CAN ONLY SAY THAT YOU ARE ABOVE THE OTHER THREE WHEN IT COMES TO THE QUALIFY OF SWORDS-MANSHIP.
I AM IN NO POSITION TO INTERFERE IN SUCH A MATTER MIFUYU.
I CONSULTED MY FATHER WHO IS THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE SHOGUNATE GOVERNMENT.
...TO HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON SUCH AN IMPORTANT ISSUE.
I'M HONORED ...
HE ALSO URGED ME TO SEEK YOUR OPINION IN ORDER TO CEMENT MY STANCE ON THE ISSUE.
I SEE.
THAT'S WHY HE REFERRED TO YOU.
MY FATHER RECOGNIZES YOU AS THE DE FACTO LEADER OF THE PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMEN CIRCLE.
HE CERTAINLY KNOWS THE POLITICAL ROPES.
...
TANUMA-DONO HAS PASSED THE BUCK TO ME IN VIEW OF COMPLI-CATIONS CENTERING AROUND THE DOJO.

MINUTES AFTER MIFUYU'S DEPARTURE...

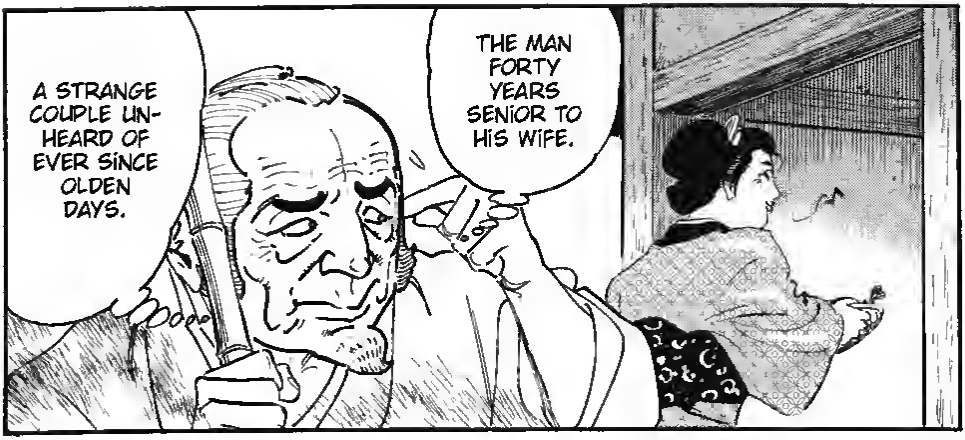
MIFUYU WAS WITH KOHEI FOR A FEW HOURS.

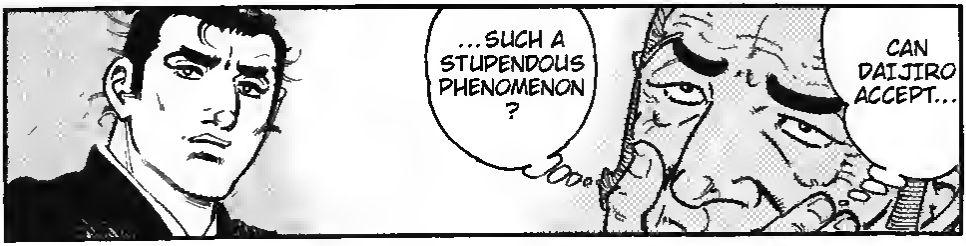
I CAME BACK IN TIME FOR DINNER.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

...OHARU CAME BACK FROM A VISIT TO HER NATIVE VILLAGE OF SEKIYA.

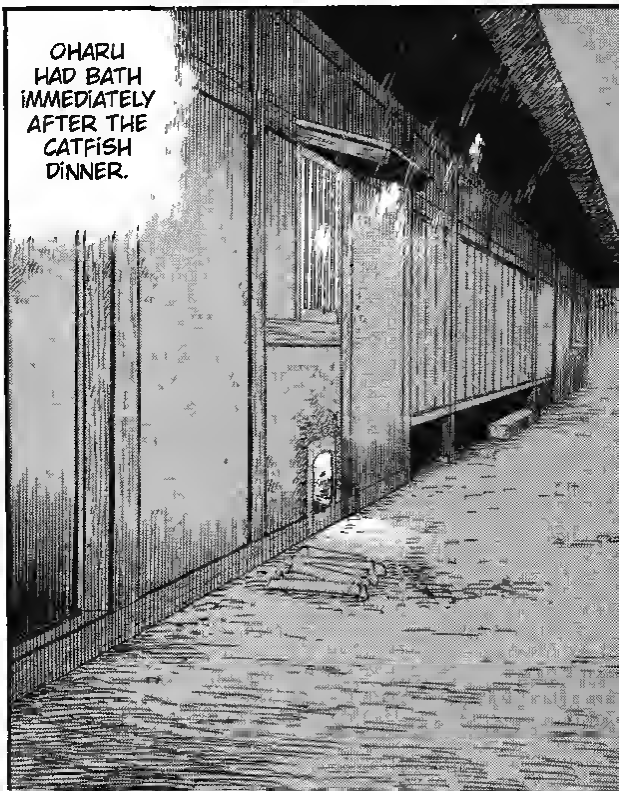
!
IT SMELLS SEX.
MOOF?
I WAS JUST BURNING FIRE WOOD FOR A HOT BATH.
WHY THE SMELL, DARLING?
IF YOU SAY SO.
MY PAPA GAVE ME SOME CATFISH TO COOK FOR DINNER.

IS THERE A BETTER WAY?
?
...THEN SLICE UP THE MEAT TO BE BOILED OR COOKED IN A PAN.
CUT THE BONES OUT, REMOVE THE GOOEY LIQUID ON THE SKIN...
...
YOU'RE GOING TO MARRY ME WITHOUT FAIL.
THEN I'LL BE YOUR LEGITIMATE WIFE, RIGHT?
AS SOON AS DAIJIRO SENSEI COMES BACK FROM YAMATO.
JEES!
HE ALWAYS STICKS TO HIS WORDS.
A SWORDSMAN NEVER LIES.
YES, I SAID SO.
NOW I BELIEVE YOU!
YOU SAID IT AGAIN!
THAT WAS NOT A LIE!


A STRANGE COUPLE UNHEARD OF EVER SINCE OLDEN DAYS.
THE MAN FORTY YEARS SENIOR TO HIS WIFE.

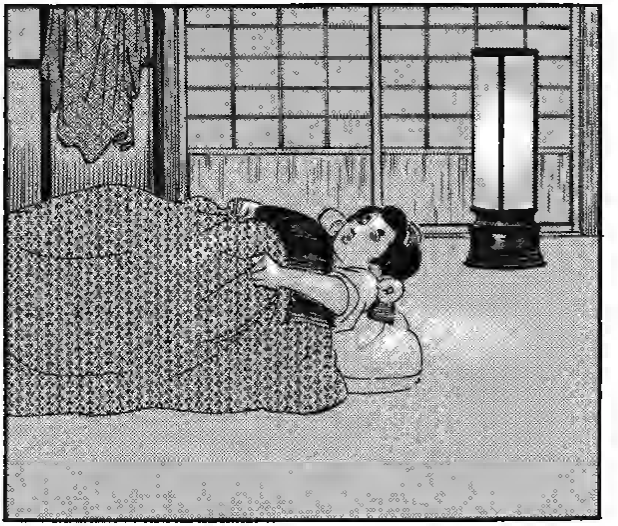

...SUCH A STUPENDOUS PHENOMENON ?
CAN DAIJIRO ACCEPT...

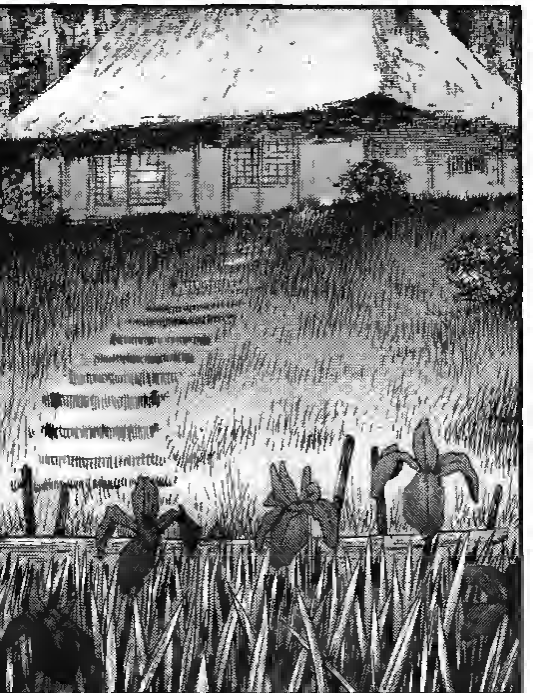
犬の用心
KOHEI PLUNGED INTO THE TUB WELL AFTER THAT.

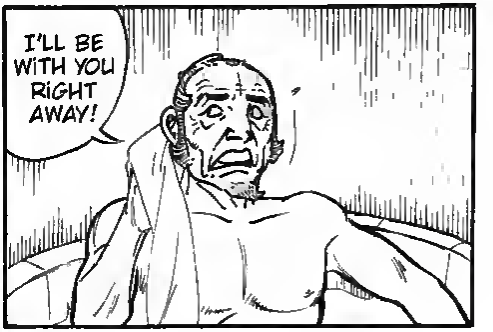

OHARU HAD BATH IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE CATFISH DINNER.

HOOOM!
I'VE BEEN ENTRUSTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO SOLVE THE CONUNDRUM OF THE ISEKI DOJO.

COME TO BED QUICK, DARLING!





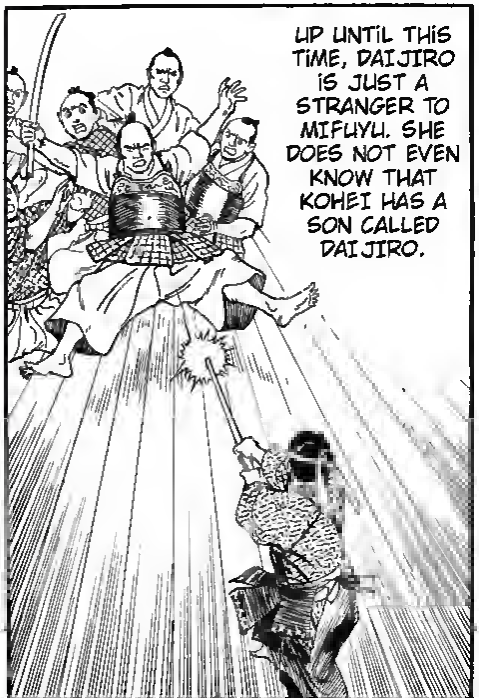

I'LL BE WITH YOU RIGHT AWAY!

THE CONUNDRUM CAN WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW.

ON THE NEXT DAY, KOHEI AKIYAMA MADE A RECONNAISSANCE TRIP TO THE ISEKI DOJO. ISEKI DOJO, USED TO BE JUST THE BIGGEST IN EDO IN TERMS OF ELITE MEMBERSHIP THANKS TO OF THE EXTENSIVE SUPPORT RENDERED BY OKITSUGU TANUMA, THE PRIME MINISTER.

YOU'VE GOT NO GUTS!
YOUR FENCING SKILLS ARE GETTING WORSE.

AS THE READER MAY RECALL...
SHE IS DOING ALL RIGHT.

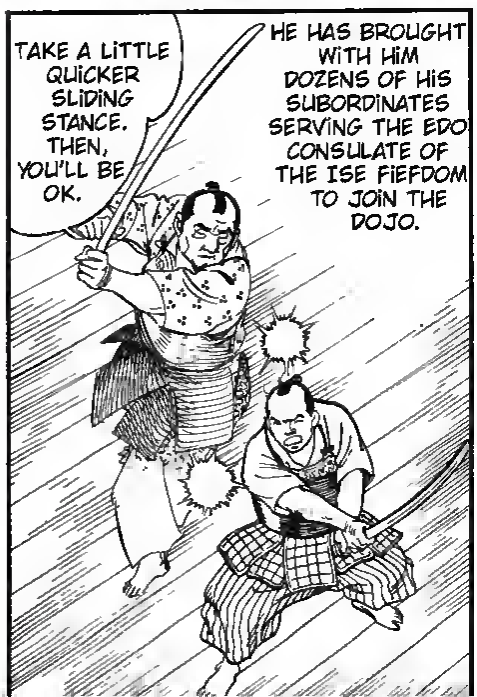

UP UNTIL THIS TIME, DAIJIRO IS JUST A STRANGER TO MIFUYU. SHE DOES NOT EVEN KNOW THAT KOHEI HAS A SON CALLED DAIJIRO.

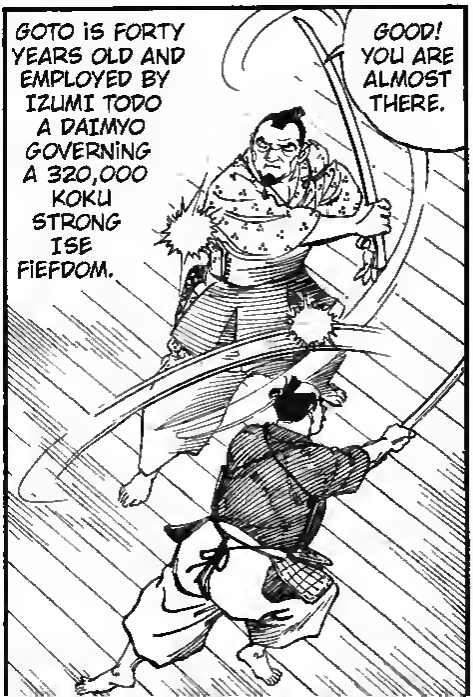
...KOHEI HAD CHECKED ON MIFUYU SOME YEARS BEFORE IN PREPARATION OF DAIJIRO'S POSSIBLE INVOLVEMENT IN A MATCH WITH MIFUYU.

I'LL BE THE NEXT.
LET ME BE THE FIRST TO CHALLENGE.
YOU CHALLENGE ME ONE AT A TIME.

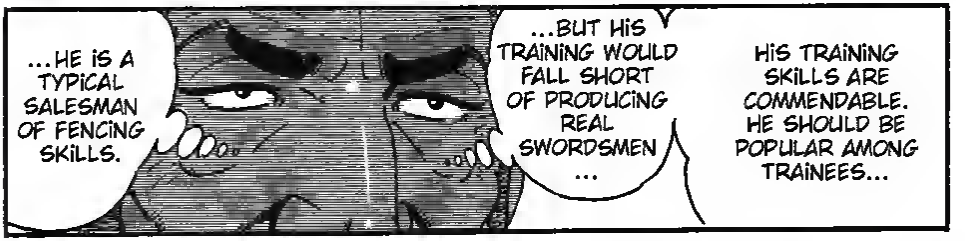
...ONE OF THE FOUR SENIOR TRAINEES OF THE DOJO.

HE SHOULD BE KUHEI GOTO,...


TAKE A LITTLE QUICKER SLIDING STANCE. THEN, YOU'LL BE OK.
HE HAS BROUGHT WITH HIM DOZENS OF HIS SUBORDINATES SERVING THE EDO CONSULATE OF THE ISE FIEFDOM TO JOIN THE DOJO.


GOTO IS FORTY YEARS OLD AND EMPLOYED BY IZUMI TODO A DAIMYO GOVERNING A 320,000 KOKU STRONG ISE FIEFDOM.
GOOD! YOU ARE ALMOST THERE.

YOU ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK!


...HE IS A TYPICAL SALESMAN OF FENCING SKILLS.
...BUT HIS TRAINING WOULD FALL SHORT OF PRODUCING REAL SWORDSMEN ...
HIS TRAINING SKILLS ARE COMMENDABLE. HE SHOULD BE POPULAR AMONG TRAINEES...

HE IS AFTER MONEY AND FAME.

HERE COMES TORA-SABURO SHIBU-TANI.

WHAT ABOUT HIS PERSON-ALITY.
...NOBODY COULD EQUAL MR. SHIBUTANI AT THE DOJO.
WHEN IT COMES TO FENCING SKILLS...
THAT'S QUITE A CHAR-ACTER.
HE NEVER LAUGHS.
HE IS RETICENT AND IS KNOWN BY HIS GLOOMY COMPLECTION.
TRAINEE ARE AFRAID OF HIM.
HE TRAINS WITH INTIMIDATING MANNERS.
HE IS A TOUGH TRAINER WHO WOULD NOT GIVE A BREAK TO TRAINEES.
NO BODY ELSE? WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU.

A LONE SWORDSMAN WITH SUPERB FENCING SKILLS, I SEE.
ビュ
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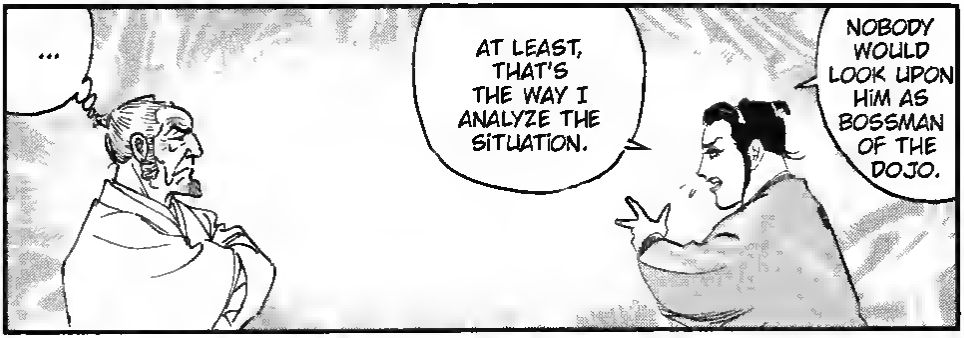
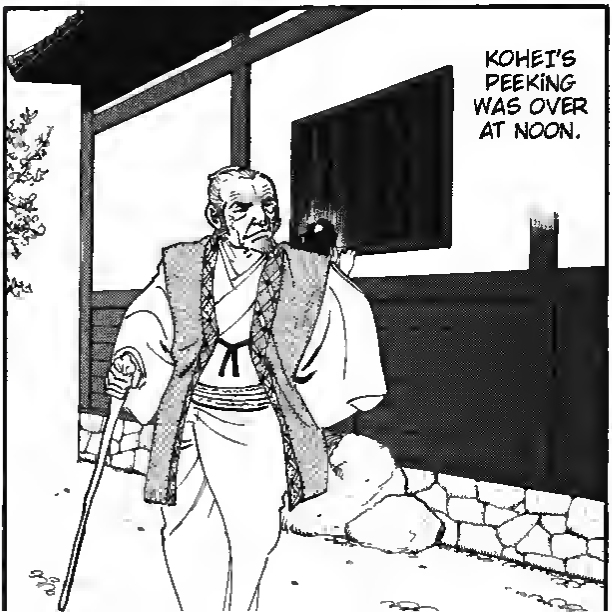
WHAT ABOUT KAZUE OZAWA.
KAZUE OZAWA IS THE SECOND SON OF A 5,000 KOKU STRONG HATAMOTO CALLED IWAMI OZAWA, SERVING AS CHANCERY HEAD.
SO, THAT'S OZAWA.
HOW DO YOU COMPARE GOTO'S SKILLS WITH THOSE OF OZAWA.
...ALTHOUGH HE IS ONLY 26 YEARS OF AGE.
I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT OZAWA'S FENCING SKILLS ARE BETTER THAN MINE...

...OZAWA SHOULD TAKE OVER THE DOJO, THEN.
BASED ON THE LEVEL OF SKILLS,...
OZAWA'S SKILLS ARE BETTER, I WOULD SAY.

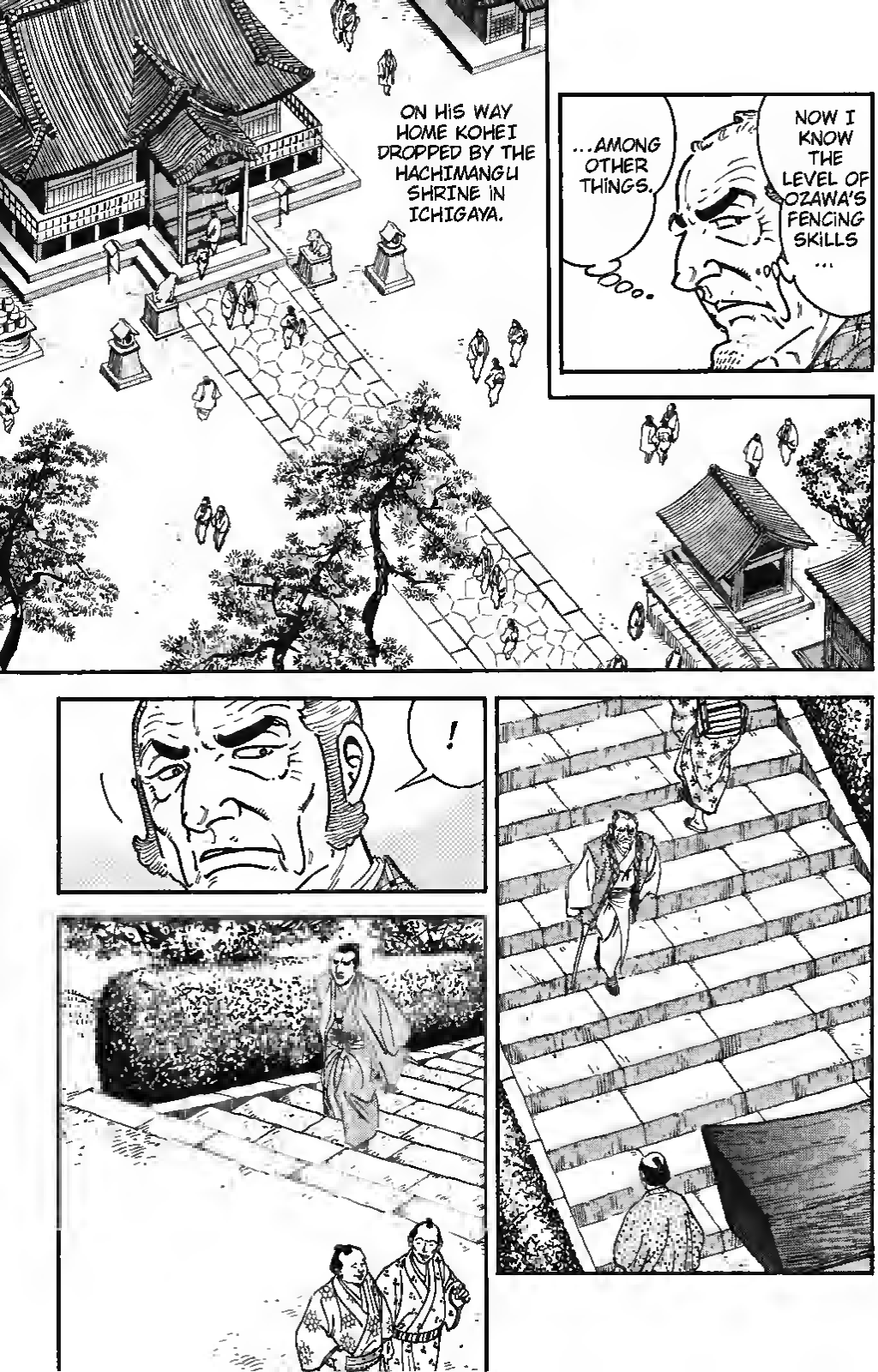
WHY NOT?

IT WILL BE A DISGRACE TO THE GREAT NAME OF CHU-HACHIRO ISEKI.
PEOPLE WOULD NOT ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN.


...
AT LEAST, THAT'S THE WAY I ANALYZE THE SITUATION.
NOBODY WOULD LOOK UPON HIM AS BOSSMAN OF THE DOJO.


KOHEI'S PEEKING WAS OVER AT NOON.

...BEFORE ARRIVING AT A SOLID PLAN.
I WILL HAVE TO DO A BIT MORE DATA GATHERING...


ON HIS WAY HOME KOHEI DROPPED BY THE HACHIMANGU SHRINE IN ICHIGAYA.
...AMONG OTHER THINGS.
NOW I KNOW THE LEVEL OF OZAWA'S FENCING SKILLS ...
!

THAT'S NO OTHER THAN KAZUE OZAWA!
EXCUSE ME!
万屋
!
WHAT A PROFESSIONAL HANDLING OF THE INCIDENT!
NO, JUST NOTHING.
IS THERE ANYTHING THE MATTER WITH YOU?
YOU ARRIVED EARLY OZAWA-SAMA.
万屋

A SWORDSMAN FREQUENTING A GEISHA RESTAURANT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY?
ON THE NEXT DAY...
...MIFUYU RUSHED TO KOHEI'S ABODE WITH AN EMERGENCY REPORT.

AN APPRENTICE BONZE OF CHOEN TEMPLE SPOTTED A BLOOD-STAINED SAMRAI'S CORPSE RIGHT OUTSIDE OF THE TEMPLE COMPOUND EARLY THIS MORNING.
DID HE DIE OF A SWORDS WOUND?
TORASABURO SHIBUYA WAS MURDERED, DO YOU SAY?
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAP-PENED.
THAT MEANS THE SKULL WAS BROKEN BEFORE A SWORD ATTACK.
...THE SKULL HAD BEEN SMASHED OPEN BEFORE THAT.
YES, BY A DEEP THRUST THOUGH THE HEART, BUT APPARENTLY ...
THAT WOULD MAKE MY VISIT AN OFFICIAL AFFAIR.
I WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR VISITING THE DOJO WHEN SHIBUYA'S REMAINS ARE NOW AT REST IN STATE.
THAT'S RIGHT.

I DO NOT THINK THAT'S A SMART MOVE TO TAKE AT THIS STAGE OF THE GAME.
NO.
NEVER MIND, SENSEI.
HAVE SOMEONE DELIVER IT IN A HURRY.
I'LL WRITE A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE OWNER OF A RESTAURANT CALLED MUSASHIYA IN YOTSUYA.
I SHOULD NOT BE INVOLVED OFFICIALLY AS YET.
...
TORASABURO SHIBUYA'S BODY LAY ON THE BACK IN A DARK STREET CALLED KURAYAMI ZAKA WHICH LITERALLY MEANS DARK SLOPE.

...WHICH WAS THE FATAL SWORD THRUST THOUGH THE HEART.
I ACCOMPANIED THE CORONER FOR IN-SITU EXAMINATION.
...
THEN CAME THE SECOND ATTACK...
A HEAVY ROCK THROWN FROM ABOVE SHOULD HAVE HIT HIS HEAD FIRST.

THEN WHAT?
...AND ENJOYED A HEARTY DINNER OVER SAKE.
SHIBUYA-DONO LEFT THE DOJO TOWARDS THE SUN SET...
...EVEN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SAKE.
IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT A TOP-NOTCH SWORDSMEN LIKE SHIBUYA WAS MURDERED THAT EASILY...
...TO LOSE HIS USUAL ALERTNESS.
HE MUST HAVE GOTTEN A BIT TOO TIPSY...
I'M AT YOUR DISPOSAL.
YES,...
I WANT YOU TO STAY OVER WITH ME TO NIGHT.
I COUNT ON YOUR PROFES-SIONAL CONTRI-BUTION.
...A SCHEME TO MULL OVER WITH YOU.
WE'VE GOT...

THE OBJECT OF YOUR SEARCH IS A SWORDSMAN BY THE NAME OF KAZUE OZAWA.
THIS IS THE MONEY TO FACILITATE YOUR SEARCH WITH.
THANK YOU INDEED.
KOHEI AND YASHICHI DISCUSSED SEARCH STRATEGIES UNTIL LATE AT NIGHT.

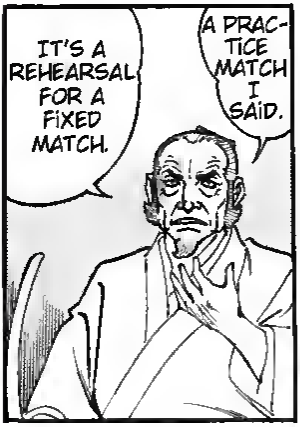
YASHICHI LEFT KOHEI'S ABODE EARLY IN THE NEXT MORNING.
IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE SAME DAY MIFUYU WAS SUMMONED FOR FURTHER QUESTIONING BY KOKEI.
IS MR. SHIBUYA'S DEATH RELATED TO...
...THE FATE OF THE ISEKI DOJO.
THAT'S WHAT I SUSPECT.
THEREFORE YOU SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY FROM NOW ON.

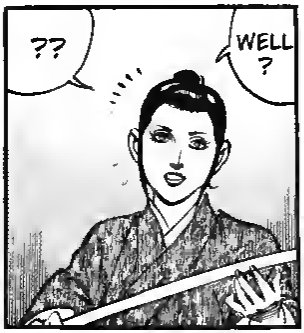
I SEE.
LEAVE DOJO IMMEDIATELY AFTER TRAINING IS OVER.
REFRAIN FROM LEAVING THE ABODE AFTER DARK.
THANK YOU INDEED.
...IS BEING WORKED ON IN ERNEST.
LET ME REMIND YOU AT THE SAME TIME, THAT THE ASSIGNMENT YOU GAVE ME...
BEFORE YOU LEAVE TODAY...
LET'S HAVE A PRACTICE MATCH USING A WOOD SWORD.

YES, OF COURSE.
I WANT YOU TO COME HERE FOR THREE MORE CONSECUTIVE DAYS FOR A SIMULATION MATCH LIKE THIS.

NOW PICK UP A WOOD SWORD.

BUT WHAT IS THE SIMULATION FOR?
I'VE NO OBJECTION.

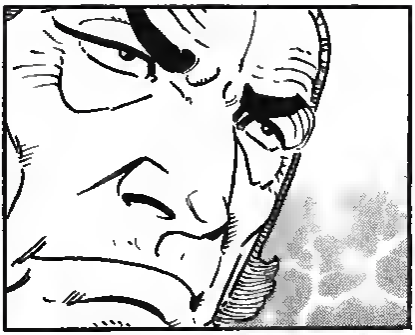

IT'S A REHEARSAL FOR A FIXED MATCH.
A PRACTICE MATCH I SAID.

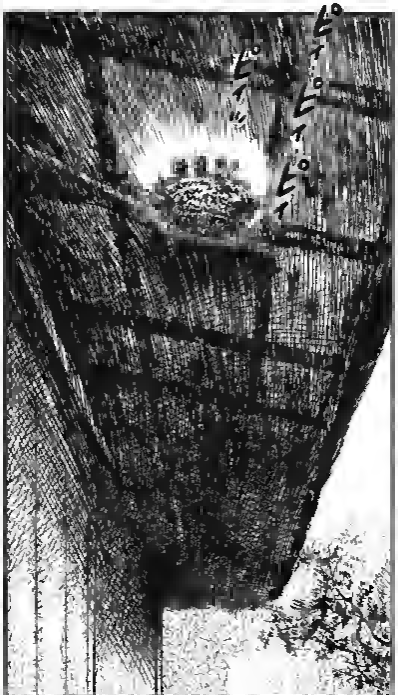

??
WELL ?

READY?

TRY TO KNOCK ME DOWN IN EARNEST.
ALL RIGHT.

YES.

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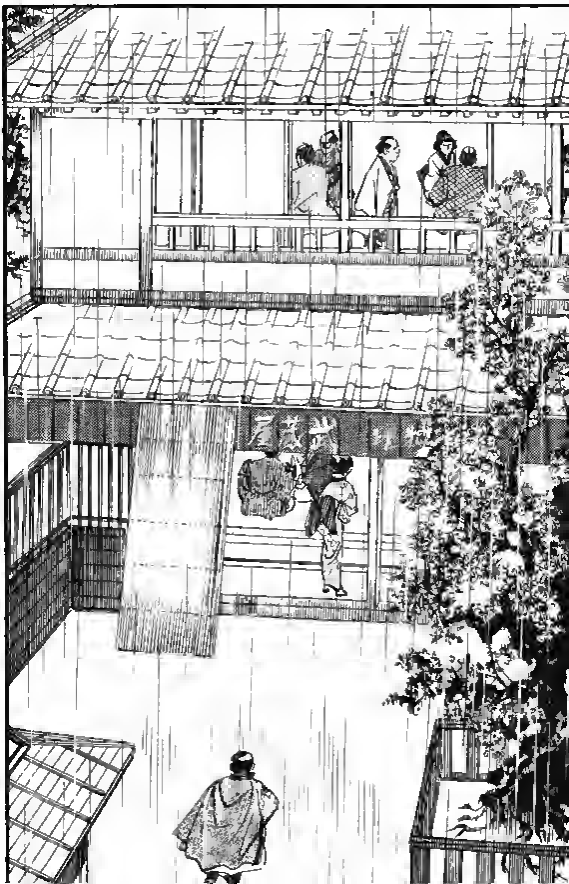
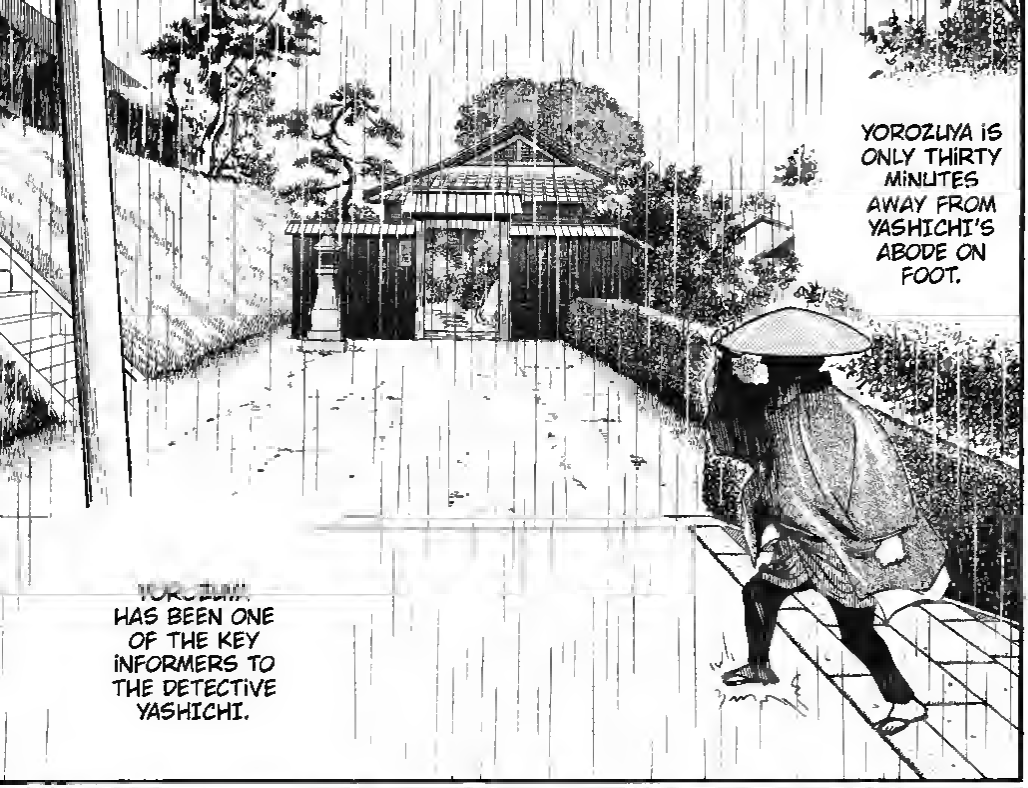
IT'S BEEN RAINING FOR DAYS WITHOUT LET UP.



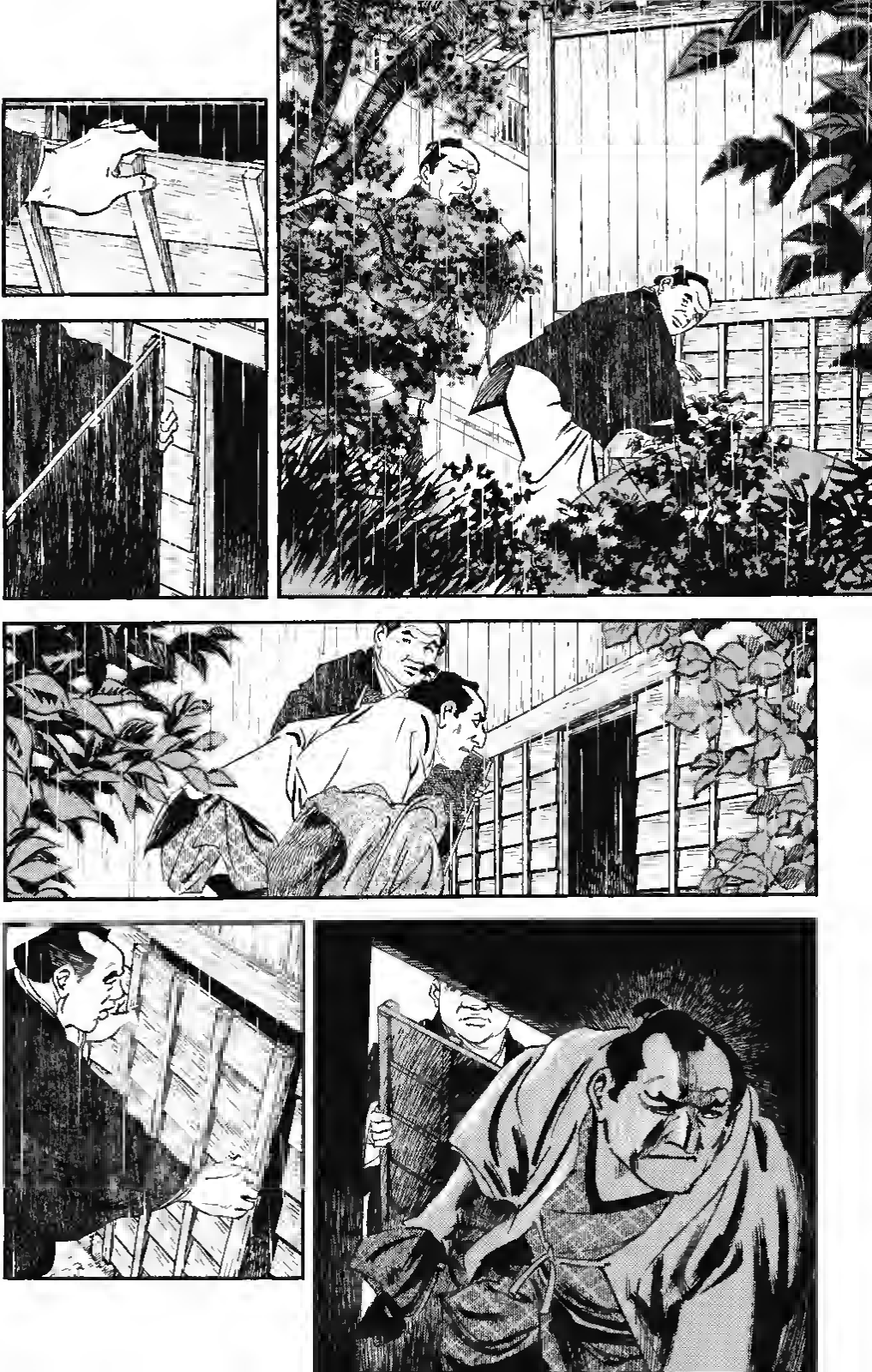
YOU HAVE BEEN OUT EVERY DAY DESPITE THIS NASTY RAIN, DEAR.
YES, AT THE REQUEST OF NO OTHER THAN RESPECTABLE AKIYAMA SENSEI.
カチャ
I'LL TAKE IT EASY TODAY.
THE TRAP HAS ALREADY BEEN LAID OUT.
DON'T YOU WORRY!
YOU SHOULD NOT BE PROCRASTI-NATING LIKE THIS.
THEN ...

KAZUE OZAWA WALKED INTO THE YOROZUYA RESTAURANT ACCOMPANIED BY TWO SAMURAI'S.
ANY NEWS TOKU-JIRO?
Hi, BOSS!
THEY ARE NOT TRAINEES OF THE ISEKI DOJO, AT LEAST.
WHAT TYPE OF SAMURAI ?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO COME WITH ME.


YOROZUYA IS ONLY THIRTY MINUTES AWAY FROM YASHICHI'S ABODE ON FOOT.
[illegible] HAS BEEN ONE OF THE KEY INFORMERS TO THE DETECTIVE YASHICHI.

THE RESTAURANT OWNER GUIDED YASHICHI TO THE ESCAPE DOOR OF ONE OF THE DETACHED BUILDINGS.

WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTING YOU OYABUN (WHICH LITERALLY MEANS BOSS MAN).

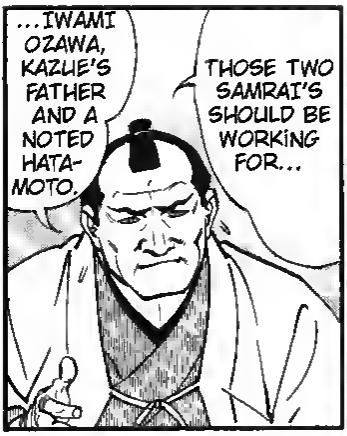


...TO ALLOW EAVESDROPPING BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OR ELITE PATRONS.
...CATERING TO THE POLITICAL CLIENTAL WOULD HAVE SUCH BUILT-IN FACILITIES ...
PRESTIGIOUS RESTAURANTS...
THERE WAS A HIDDEN SPACE TO ENABLE INCOGNITO OBSERVATION OF WHAT GOES ON IN THE DINING ROOM.
AGILITY IS MY PRIDE OZAWA-DONO.
THAT REALLY WAS A SLICK JOB, YOU TWO GUYS.
I'M GLAD TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RESPOND TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS.
YOU DIDN'T LET SHIBUYA FLINCH EVEN A SPLIT SECOND.
AND YOU, KAMIYA, THAT WAS A BEAUTIFUL THRUST.

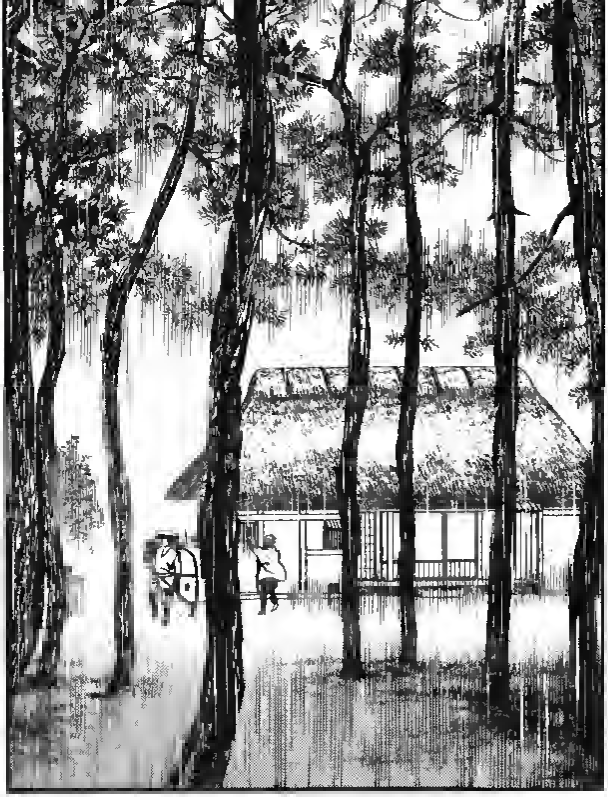
I COUNT ON YOUR ASSISTANCE IN THE FUTURE, AS WELL.
CER-TAINLY, SIR!

KAZUE OZAWA IS GOING TO BE THE DE-FACTO SUCCESSOR OF ISEKI SENSEI. HA HA HA!
NOW THAT SHIBUYA IS GONE, THE MOST SKILLED SWORDSMAN OF THE ISEKI DOJO IS ME.

...


...IWAMI OZAWA, KAZUE'S FATHER AND A NOTED HATA-MOTO.
THOSE TWO SAMRAI'S SHOULD BE WORKING FOR...

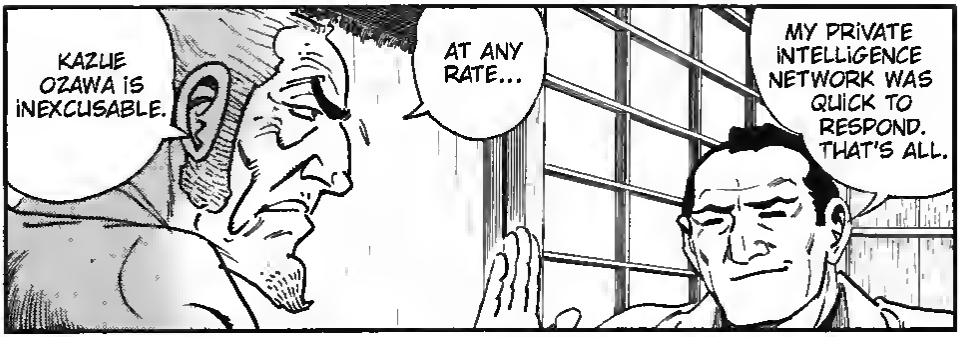
THAT'S INTER-ESTING.



I FEEL THE SAME WAY.
IT'S OUTRAGEOUS THAT SHIBUYA HAS BEEN SMITTEN IN SUCH A HUMILIATING FASHION.

...WITHOUT YOUR GUIDING LIGHT.
I WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO THE INTELLI-GENCE WORK...

I APPRECIATE YOUR QUALITY SEARCH WORK.


KAZUE OZAWA IS INEXCUSABLE.
AT ANY RATE...
MY PRIVATE INTELLIGENCE NETWORK WAS QUICK TO RESPOND. THAT'S ALL.

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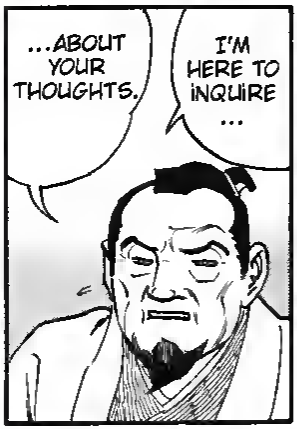
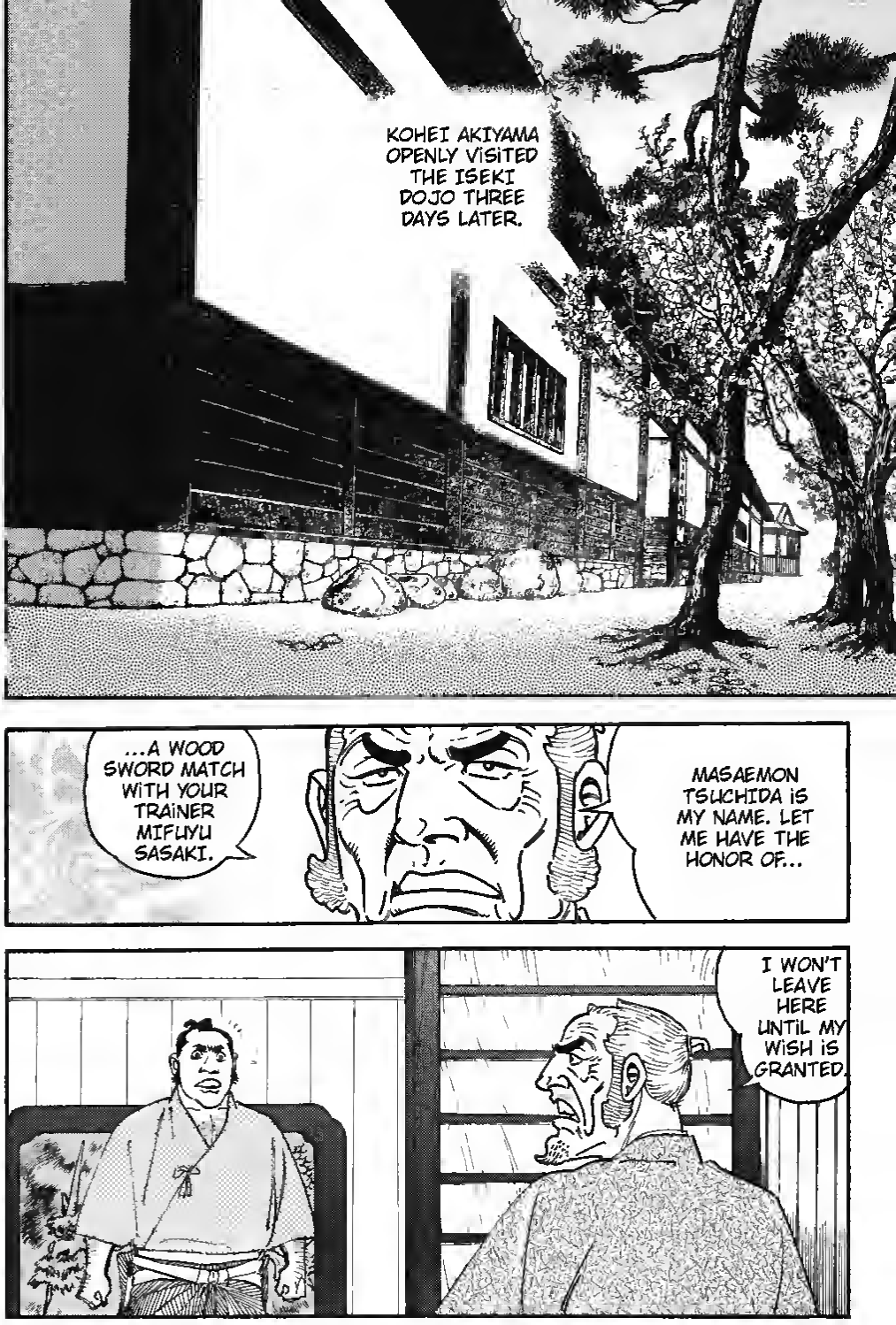

I'M HERE TO INQUIRE ...
...ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS.

THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT, PLEASE.

AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, KUHEI GOTO, ONE OF THE SENIOR TRAINERS OF ISEKI DOJO CAME TO SEE MIFUYU AT HER ABODE.

...
...TO TAKE OVER THE ISEKI DOJO.
SPECIFICALLY, TELL ME IF YOU ARE WILLING...
...SUBJECT TO MY FATHER TANUMA'S APPROVAL.
I'M WILLING TO TAKE OVER ISEKI DOJO AS SUCCESSOR OF ISEKI SENSEI...
GOTO EXPECTED THAT MIFUYU WOULD VOLUNTARILY DROP OUT OF THE RACE.
!
...ON THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP RACE, AS A MATTER OF FACT.
I WAS COUNTING ON YOUR SUPPORT...
OH, I SEE.

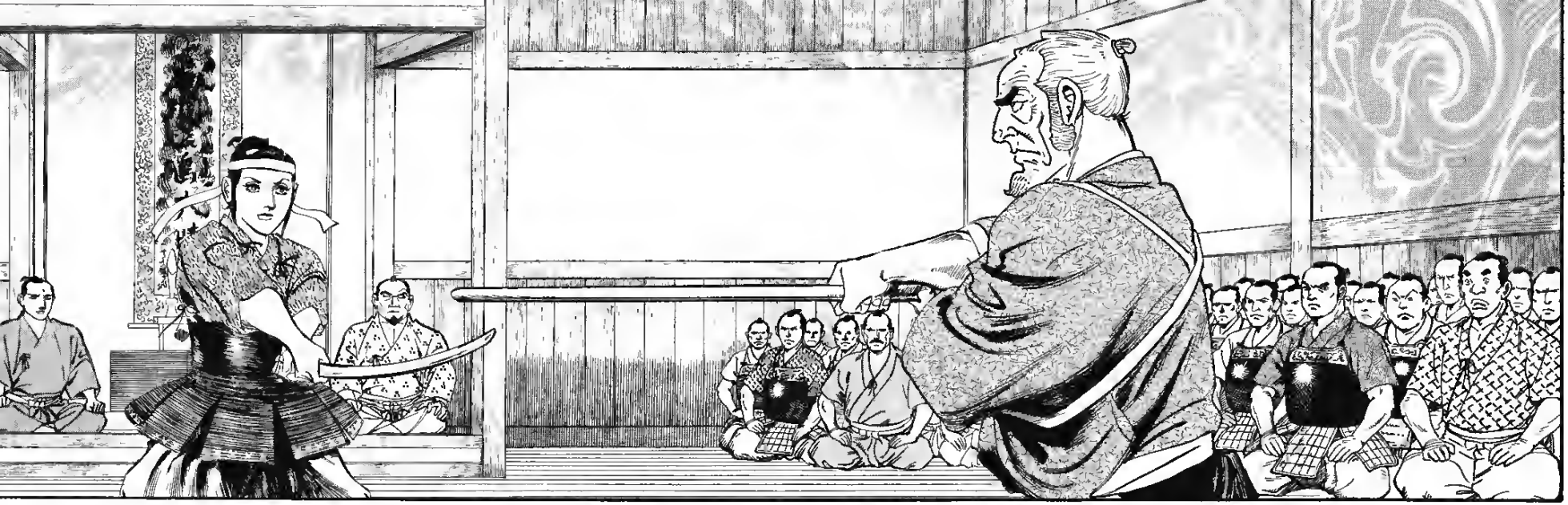

KOHEI AKIYAMA OPENLY VISITED THE ISEKI DOJO THREE DAYS LATER.
...A WOOD SWORD MATCH WITH YOUR TRAINER MIFUYU SASAKI.
MASAEMON TSUCHIDA IS MY NAME. LET ME HAVE THE HONOR OF...
I WON'T LEAVE HERE UNTIL MY WISH IS GRANTED.

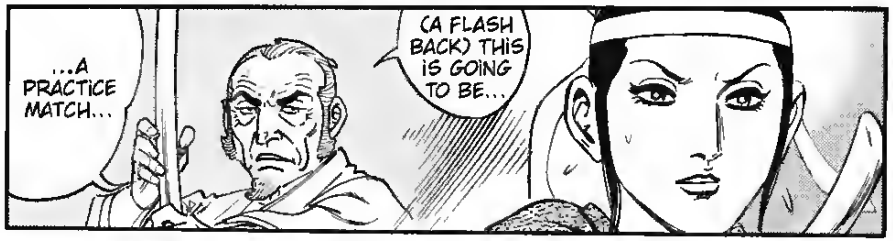
I'M MIFUYU. I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE.
MY NAME IS MASAEMON TSUCHIDA FROM A DOJO IN A REMOTE HAMLET.
A CRAZY OLD STICK.
WHAT'S ON HIS MIND, AFTER ALL.
COME!

HE ISN'T JUST A COUNTRY SWORD-SWINGER
WHAT THE HECK!
NUUM!
OOFF!

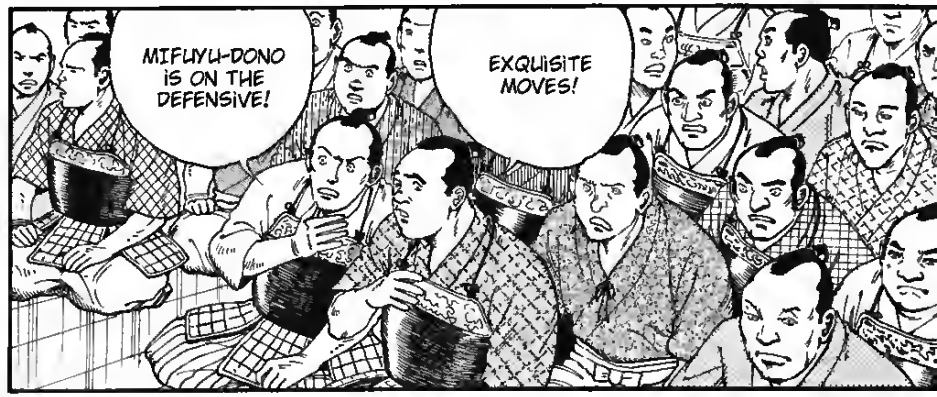
WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.
!!
TUAAH!

ALICH!




...A PRACTICE MATCH...
(A FLASH BACK) THIS IS GOING TO BE...

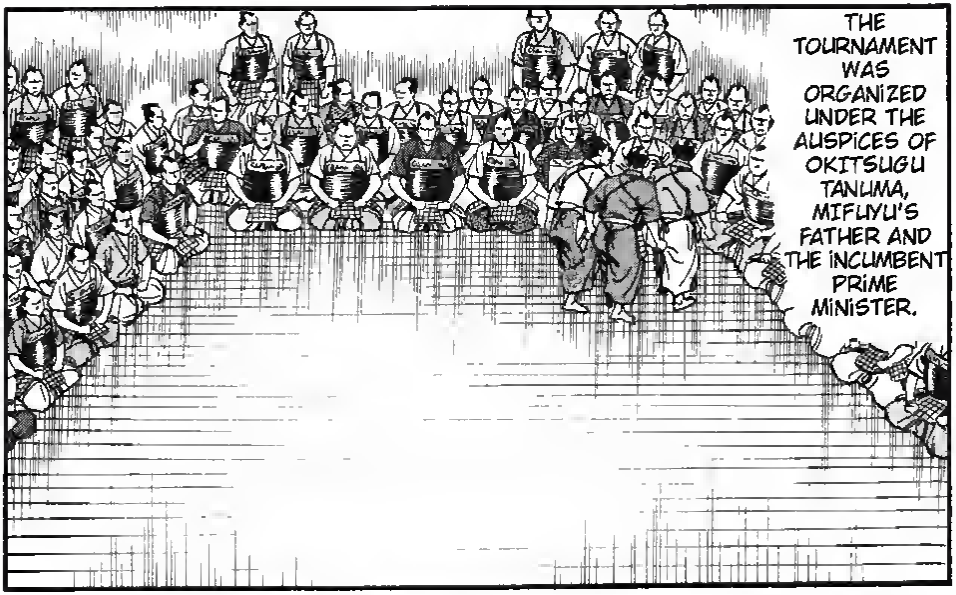
?
...BETWEEN TWO TOP NOTCH SWORDSMEN.
...TO STAGE A DESPERATE FIGHT...


MIFUYU-DONO IS ON THE DEFENSIVE!
EXQUISITE MOVES!

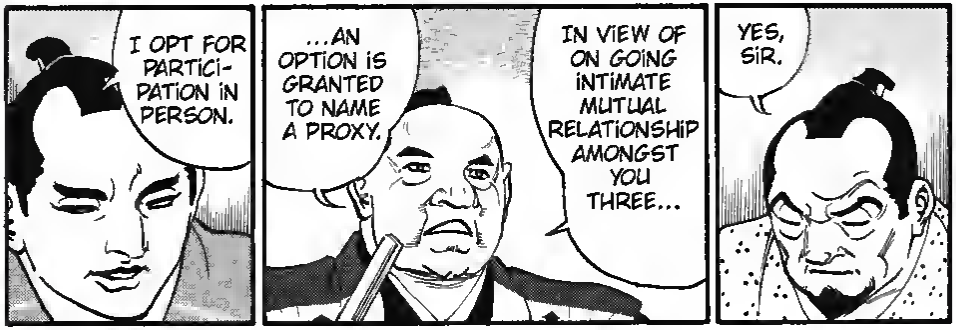
I DON'T UNDER-STAND, SENSEI.
...EVEN TO PROFES-SIONAL EYES.
THE MATCH SHOULD APPEAR TO BE GENUINE...
YES!
COME, IN EARNEST!
YOU WILL.
I HATE YOUR GUTS!
ME!
...

(COMING BACK TO REALITY) TWOW!
WOW!

WHAT A CONVINC-ING ACT!
LET ME BEG YOU TO AFFIX MY NAME TO THE LIST OF YOUR TRAINEES.
I WAS IMPETUOUS. NOW I SURRENDER.
...
...
A TRIPARTITE TOURNAMENT TO SELECT THE SUCCESSOR OF MASTER ISEKI WAS SCHEDULED FOR TEN DAYS AFTER THIS INCIDENT.


THE TOURNAMENT WAS ORGANIZED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF OKITSUGU TANUMA, MIFUYU'S FATHER AND THE INCUMBENT PRIME MINISTER.

...WILL BE DESIGNATED AS THE SUCCESSOR OF THE DOJO.
THE WINNER OF THE TOURNA-MENT...
SHIROBEI MIYOSHI, A MINISTER OF THE GOVERNMENT, WAS THERE AS PROXY JUDGE APPOINTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER TANUMA.


I OPT FOR PARTICI-PATION IN PERSON.
...AN OPTION IS GRANTED TO NAME A PROXY.
IN VIEW OF ON GOING INTIMATE MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP AMONGST YOU THREE...
YES, SIR.

DO YOU HAVE ANY-THING TO SAY?
...JUST ONE MO-MENT.
PLEASE GIVE ME...
YES, YOUR HONOR.
STEP OUT MASA-EMON TSUCHI-DA!
IN THE LIGHT OF THE RULE SET FORTH BY THE JUDGE, LET ME APPOINT THIS PERSON AS MY PROXY PARTICIPANT.

THE HURDLE HAS BEEN LOWERED.
WE KNOW MIFUYU BEAT THIS STICK ONCE BEFORE.
THAT'S WHAT I SUSPECTED.
A CHICKEN!
...I WILL WITHDRAW FROM THIS TOURNAMENT.
SHOULD TSUCHIDA BE BEATEN BY EITHER ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES ...
OZAWA SENSEI IS GOING TO BE THE WINNER.
NO, THE RESULT IS ALREADY CRYSTAL CLEAR.
THE PLOT THICKENS.
...WHO RUNS, A DOJO IN YUSHIMA.
SHIROBEI MIYOSHI, THE SUPERVISOR OF THE TOURNAMENT APPOINTED A REFEREE BY THE NAME OF MAGOJIRO KANEKO...

A SINGLE CLEAR HIT ON THE BODY DECIDES THE WINNER.
I'M GONNA BREAK THIS OLD STICK INTO HALF.
DAA---!
MOOF!

MY MUSCLES ARE GETTING STIFF.
!!
I CANNOT FOCUS !
WOOF!
...

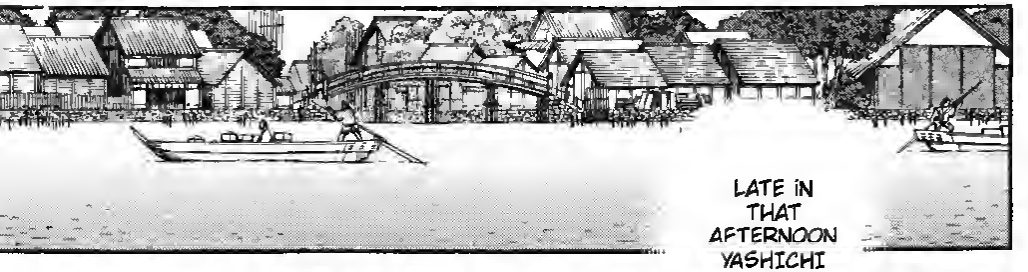
THAT'S IT.
WHAT A TOUGH STICK!

THIS STICK SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE LONG LIST OF MY VICTIMS.
I'VE BEATEN DOZENS OF PROFESSIONAL SWORDSMEN.

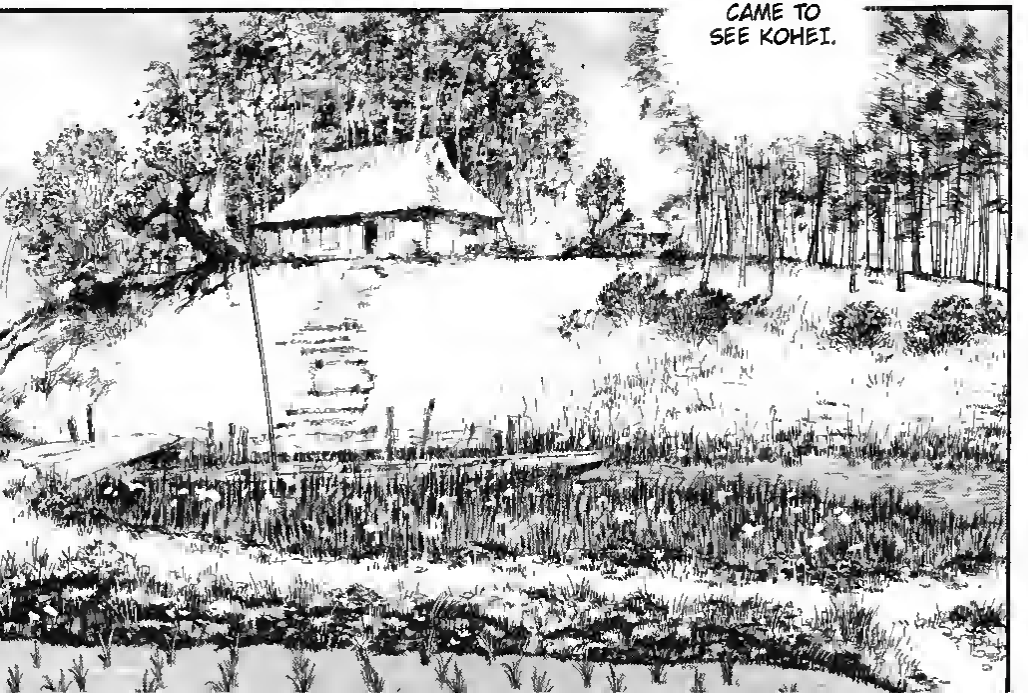
KYEEH!

HOLD IT!
A CLEAR HIT!
ACH!
...

THAT WAS A FORMIDABLE SKILL. CAN I SET UP A FORMAL MEETING WITH YOU SOON?
PLEASE TELL ME WHERE WE CAN REACH YOU.
HE LIVES IN A REMOTE COUNTRY SIDE.
BESIDES HE IS IMPEDIMENTS IN SPEECH.

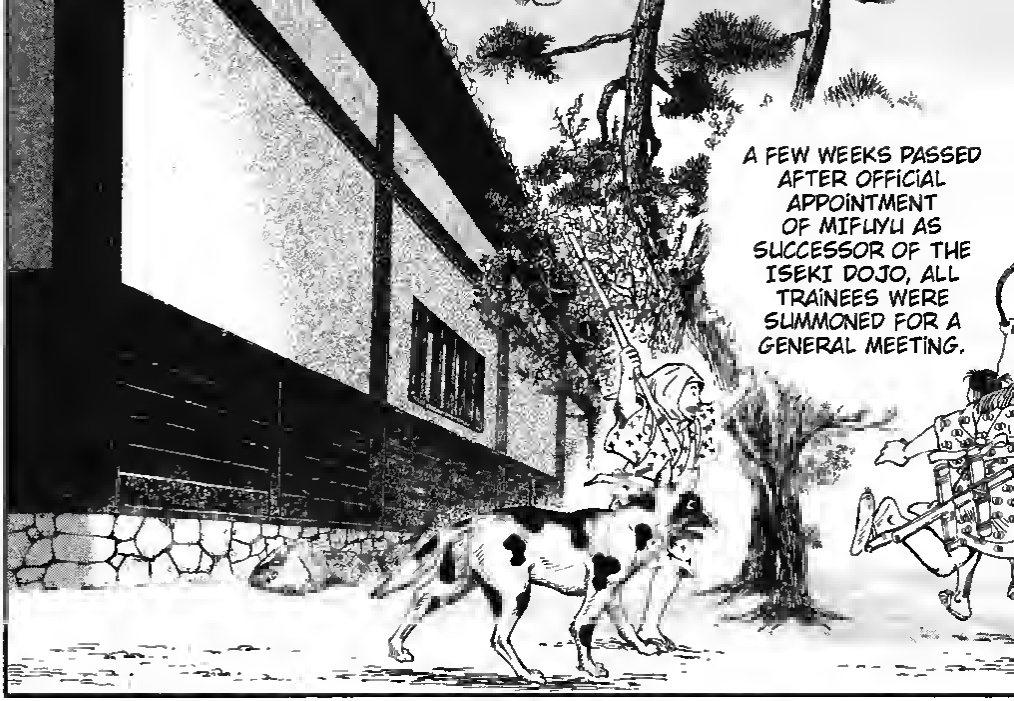


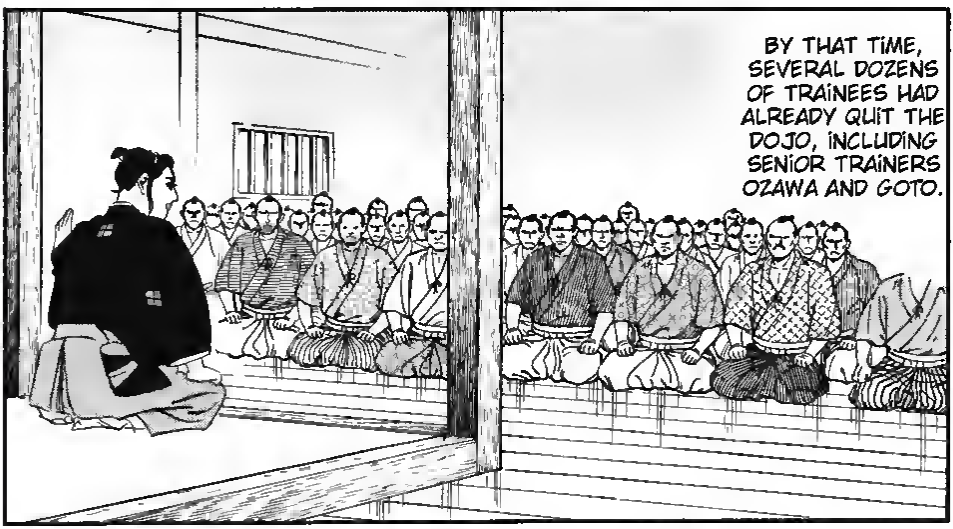
LATE IN THAT AFTERNOON YASHICHI CAME TO SEE KOHEI.



OH, YOU DID?
I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THE SPECTACLE, SENSEI.
...?
FOR THE FIRST TIME...
CERTAINLY!
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO OZAWA AND HIS STOOGES, NAMELY KAMIYA AND YAMASHITA?
IF YOU ACCUSE THEM IN THE OPEN, YOUR ACTION MAY SMEAR THE NAME OF THE ISEKI DOJO, AND EVENTUALLY THAT OF THE PRIME MINISTER.
I GUESS IT'S BEST TO LET THINGS RIDE.
JUST AMAZING.
...DID I WITNESS A WOOD SWORD CHOPPING OFF ANOTHER WOOD SWORD.
WELL, THAT HAPPENS.

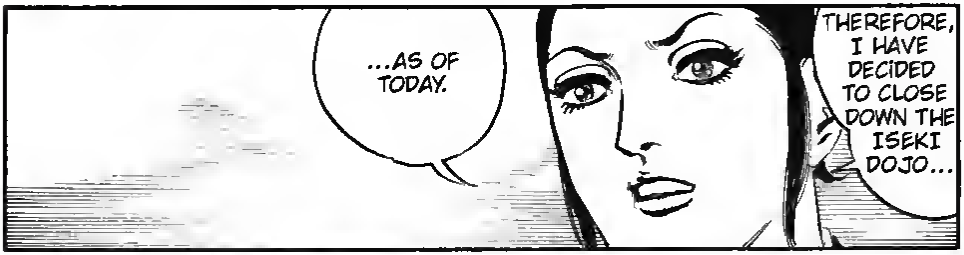
...
...THAT ONE OF ITS SENIOR TRAINERS GOT THE SKULL SMASHED WITH OUT OFFERING ANY RE-SISTANCE.
SUPPORTERS OF THE ISEKI DOJO WON'T BE HAPPY EITHER BY LETTING THE PUBLIC KNOW...
YOU SHOULD NOT LET THEM ESCAPE JUDGMENT.
BUT, SENSEI. EVIL PEOPLE HAVE CONSPIRED.
JUST LET THE WHOLE THING RIDE.
...
THE HEAVEN IS ABOVE US TO EXECUTE ITS WILL.
IF WE HUMANS SKIP THE JUDG-MENT.
OZAWA AND HIS GANG WON'T BE ABLE TO ESCAPE THAT JUDGMENT BY HEAVEN.


A FEW WEEKS PASSED AFTER OFFICIAL APPOINTMENT OF MIFUYU AS SUCCESSOR OF THE ISEKI DOJO, ALL TRAINEES WERE SUMMONED FOR A GENERAL MEETING.

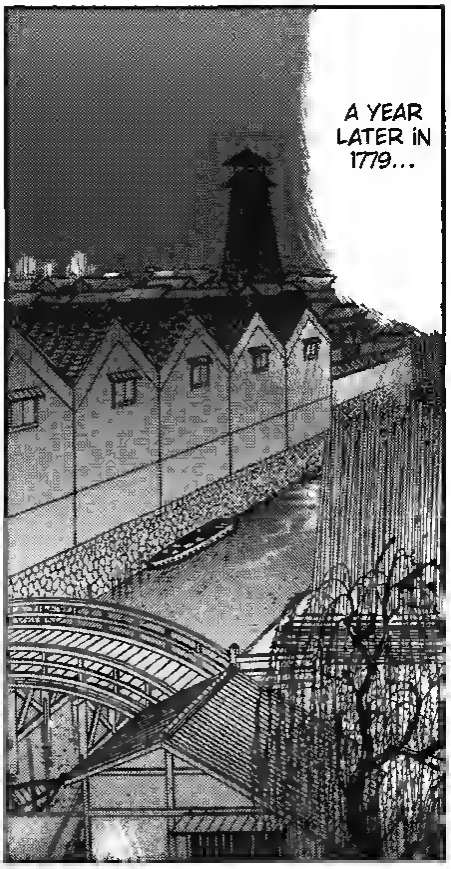

BY THAT TIME, SEVERAL DOZENS OF TRAINEES HAD ALREADY QUIT THE DOJO, INCLUDING SENIOR TRAINERS OZAWA AND GOTO.

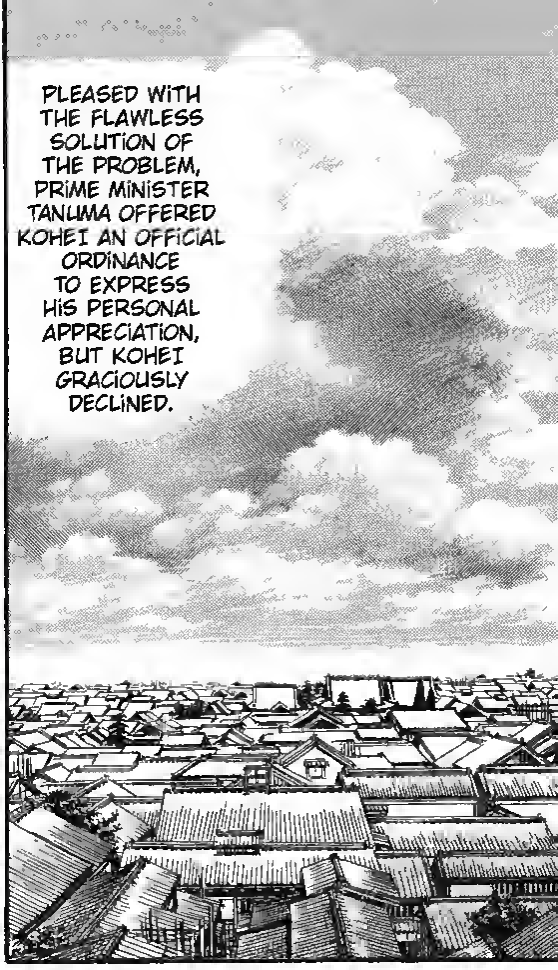
I HAVE TRIED MY VERY BEST.
I WAS SELECTED TO TAKE OVER HIS HONORABLE TRADITION.
ALL OF YOU KNOW THAT CHUHACHIRO ISEKI SENSEI WAS A GREAT SWORDSMAN OF DIGNIFIED PERSONALITY.

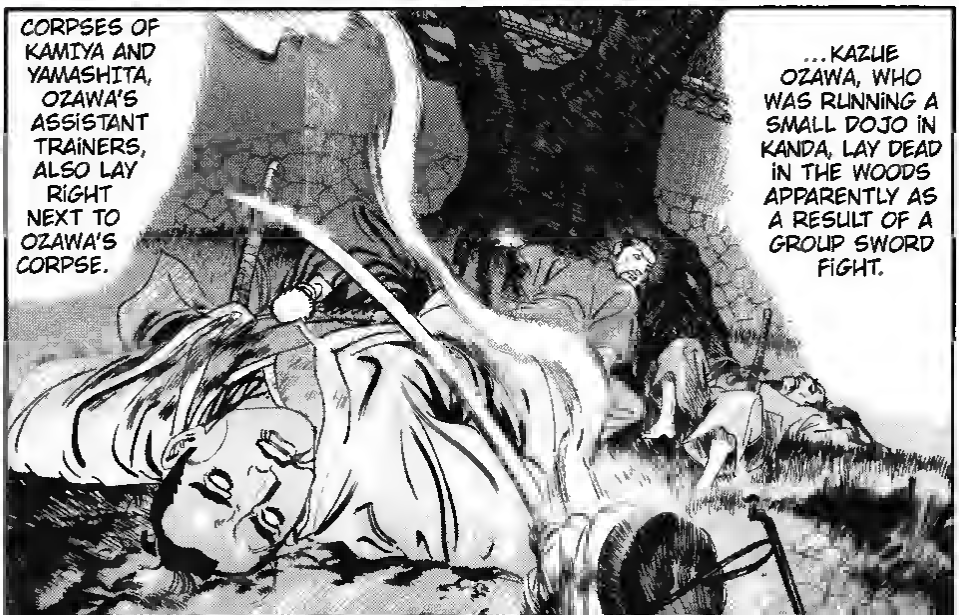
BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE MUCH TIME TO REALIZE...
...THAT I'M JUST A SMALL FRY COMPARED WITH THE GREAT ISEKI SENSEI.


THEREFORE, I HAVE DECIDED TO CLOSE DOWN THE ISEKI DOJO...
...AS OF TODAY.

ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF ENTHUSIASTIC TRAINEES PLEADED MIFUYU TO CHANGE HER MIND, MIFUYU WAS ADAMANT.


A YEAR LATER IN 1779...


PLEASED WITH THE FLAWLESS SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM, PRIME MINISTER TANUMA OFFERED KOHEI AN OFFICIAL ORDINANCE TO EXPRESS HIS PERSONAL APPRECIATION, BUT KOHEI GRACIOUSLY DECLINED.


CORPSES OF KAMIYA AND YAMASHITA, OZAWA'S ASSISTANT TRAINERS, ALSO LAY RIGHT NEXT TO OZAWA'S CORPSE.
...KAZUE OZAWA, WHO WAS RUNNING A SMALL DOJO IN KANDA, LAY DEAD IN THE WOODS APPARENTLY AS A RESULT OF A GROUP SWORD FIGHT.

DETECTIVE YASHICHI WAS QUICK TO REPORT TO KOHEI ABOUT THE INCIDENT.
WELL, ...
...AS I WAS SAYING...
I'M IMPRESSED BY YOUR PROPHETIC FORESIGHT.
A HEAVENLY JUDGMENT HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN.
...THE HEAVEN KNOWS.
HEAVEN KNOWS EVERY THING.
THE COINCIDENCE IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF LAYMAN'S COMPREHENSION.
IT'S AMAZING THAT THE JUDGMENT WAS EXECUTED EXACTLY ONE YEAR AFTER THE DEATH OF TORASABURO SHIBUYA.

YES, JUST LIKE AN OLD FOX.
HEAVEN IS SCHEMINGLY MALICIOUS, AS WELL.
HUU--M!
HA, HA, HA!
I WONDER WHAT THAT FOX IS SCHEMING NEXT.

Story 4 End

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